Deconstructing Doctoral Discourses
Stories and Strategies for Success

Edited by
Deborah L. Mulligan
Naomi Ryan
Patrick Alan Danaher

palgrave
macmillan

Palgrave Studies in Education Research Methods

Series Editors
Patrick Alan Danaher
University of Southern Queensland
Toowoomba, QLD, Australia

Fred Dervin
Faculty of Educational Sciences
University of Helsinki
Helsinki, Finland

Caroline Dyer
School of Politics and International Studies
University of Leeds
Leeds, UK

Máirín Kenny
Independent researcher
Wexford, Ireland

Bobby Harreveld
School of Education and the Arts
Central Queensland University
Rockhampton, Australia

Michael Singh
Centre for Educational Research
Western Sydney University
Penrith, NSW, Australia

This series explores contemporary manifestations of the fundamental paradox that lies at the heart of education: that education contributes to the creation of economic and social divisions and the perpetuation of sociocultural marginalisation, while also providing opportunities for individual empowerment and social transformation. In exploring this paradox, the series investigates potential alternatives to current educational provision and speculates on more enabling and inclusive educational futures for individuals, communities, nations and the planet. Specific developments and innovation in teaching and learning, educational policy-making and education research are analysed against the backdrop of these broader developments and issues.

Deborah L. Mulligan
Naomi Ryan • Patrick Alan Danaher
Editors

Deconstructing Doctoral Discourses

Stories and Strategies for Success

Editors
Deborah L. Mulligan
School of Education
University of Southern Queensland
Toowoomba, QLD, Australia

Naomi Ryan
UniSQ College
University of Southern Queensland
Toowoomba, QLD, Australia

Patrick Alan Danaher
School of Education
University of Southern Queensland
Toowoomba, QLD, Australia

For all doctoral students and supervisors/advisors, research participants, stakeholders and administrators, and families and friends who conduct and support high-quality research that transforms our perceptions of and practices in the world.

SERIES EDITORS' FOREWORD: FINDING AND MINDING THE GAPS

In a very insightful exhortation to social sciences researchers, John Law (2011) wrote:

> Mind the gaps. Don't fear them. Mind them. Recollect them. Attend to them. Care for them. Cultivate them. Treat them for what they are: places in between; places of unknown potential. Okay, I agree, they're uneasy places too. (p. 5)

This fascinating book embodies the sentiment of this exhortation. The doctoral research project is intrinsically a place of unknown potential, yet that potential has to be identified, articulated, evaluated and recognised as a scholarly contribution. This much is, broadly, a certainty. And perhaps that is exactly where any certainty ends. *Deconstructing Doctoral Discourses* comes to grips, thoroughly, imaginatively and fearlessly, with the very concept of potential in the real world of doctoral research. Gaps are found, attended to, minded. Unease features, prominently, and so do the places of discomfort—and the learnings to which they give rise.

Deconstructing Doctoral Discourses is an extraordinarily rich collection of the places experienced by doctoral researchers who feature on its pages. Some of them have long since qualified, and gone on to be mentors and advisers to others; some are just emerging from doctoral study; and some are still in the thick of it. The multiplicity of these authorial and editorial voices is intrinsic to the deconstruction that runs across the volume, bringing to its pages a wide range of perspectives, experience and provocations. It's not a "how to" book for the doctoral student, although there is useful

advice and reflection in every chapter. The scope and breadth of its deconstructions, I have to confess, were more profound than I had anticipated: they spoke to me of gaps, knowing and not knowing across my own career experience—not only as a doctoral student, but also as a supervisor, mentor, examiner—and, indeed, friend/tea-maker for others doing their doctoral work.

The volume is divided into three parts. Each part is prefaced by a brief editorial introduction that picks up on key themes for the part, and specific highlights from each chapter. There are no gaps here in modelling coherence or contribution!

After the editors' opening chapter Disrupting Dominant Discourses and Celebrating Counternarratives: Sustaining Success for Doctoral Students and Supervisors, an "introduction to the doctorate" is the first part. It comprises two chapters that address the matter of identifying the "research gap" (by Geoff Danaher, Mike Danaher and Patrick Alan Danaher) and the complexities of securing human ethics approval (by Suzanne Meibusch). The second part focuses on "the body of the doctorate" and comprises 14 chapters that are divided into four subsections: "Forming and Sustaining Relationships" (with chapters by Jenni L. Harding, Boni Hamilton and Stacy Loyd; Gina Lynne Peyton, David Brian Ross, Vanaja Nethi, Melissa Tara Sasso and Lucas A. DeWitt; and Carolin Müller); "Operationalising the Study" (with chapters by Camille Thomas; and Bronte van der Horne and Jon Whitty; "Writing the Thesis" (with chapters by Belinda Cash; Anup Shrestha; Natalia Kovalyova; Dawne Fahey, Esther Fitzpatrick and Alys Mendus; and Deborah L. Mulligan); and "Developing and Articulating Doctoral Identities" (with chapters by Paola Eiras and Henk Huijser; Gina Curró; Jeanette Hannaford; and B. Vinod Kumar). The third part, "concluding the doctorate", comprises two chapters, focusing on differing protocols around the examination of the thesis and the viva (Fiona Charlton and Peter Smith) and an interrogation of postdoctoral researcher positionality (Daniel Ferreira and Robin Throne). The final, concluding chapter is a broader perspective that rounds the volume off with reflection on the past, present and potential future understandings that this book has explored (Deborah L. Mulligan and Naomi Ryan).

Each chapter is a richly reflective account of personal experience, unpacked and presented to portray the places visited and often—and necessarily—a critical commentary on some of what might otherwise be taken for granted. Some of these reflections are individual, and some are co-produced; they all offer insightful deconstructions of their journeys, whether undertaken alone or in the company of one or more others—and

are generous with the practical tips that are grounded in their experience. Every individual experience is situated in places that are "in between" in the larger university context too. There is unease across the commentaries on the increasing technicisation of the process of doctoral study, and the ever-encroaching managerialism of the modern university, with its inflexible timeframes and emphasis on research training that often seem to constrain the very core of the doctorate—philosophising. There are gaps in innovative practices intended to facilitate "untraditional" doctoral trajectories, exemplified in the experience of completing a thesis by publication, and negotiating the vagaries of examiners unused to this format, and publishing processes with peer-review processes and timeframes that march to their own tune. Discussion of the need to locate strategy in particular circumstances is embedded in reminders that knowledge generation is nuanced, complex, political and situated—and thus discourses of decontextualised "best practice" are constructively deconstructed and rightfully challenged. The emotional dimension of life before, through and after doctoral study is ever present, evoked in particular in frequently occurring words and phrases: "tenacity", "courage", "isolation", "identity", "relationships" and "agency". And there is rightfully, everywhere, an emphasis on "partnerships", "support", "stakeholders" and "wellbeing".

Deconstructing Doctoral Discourses—"DDD" as it will surely become affectionately known—is a book for academics at all stages of their scholarly lifecycle. Its deconstructions have found a gap and filled it with a rich array of lived, reflexive experience that decentres certainty in a constructive, engaging and highly readable manner. I can't help but think that it would be quite wonderful if it made its way onto the desk of anyone who is concerned with how global geopolitics, neoliberalism and ideas of cosmopolitanism are shaping, changing and contesting what doctoral study is—and should be—in the dominant "Western" university frame.

The University of Leeds, Leeds, UK   Caroline Dyer

Reference

Law, J. (2011). The explanatory burden: An essay on Hugh Raffles. *Insectopedia. Heterogeneities.* http://www.heterogeneities.net/publications/Law2011ExplanatoryBurden.pdf

Acknowledgements

The editors are very grateful to the following individuals, without whom this book would not have been published:

- The contributing authors, whose chapters constitute thoughtful and thought-provoking accounts of doctoral discourses and their deconstruction.
- Professor Caroline Dyer from the University of Leeds, United Kingdom, who contributed an encouraging and insightful Series Editors' Foreword to the book.
- Ms Becky Wyde, Ms Alice Green and her colleagues from Palgrave Macmillan, who continue to nurture and publish high-quality research about doctoral study and supervision.
- Ms Arunaa Devi and her colleagues from Springer Nature, and Mrs Sarulatha Krishnamurthy and her colleagues from Straive, who oversaw the project coordination of the book's publication effectively and efficiently.
- The two anonymous reviewers of the book proposal, whose perceptive feedback enhanced the clarity and coherence of this volume.
- The anonymous author of the clearance read of the submitted manuscript, whose timely recommendations strengthened the text.
- Sr Emilio A. Anteliz, who was very helpful in promoting the call for chapter abstracts and in related support.

Contents

Notes on Contributors

Belinda Cash is a social worker who specialises in mental health and social gerontology. Belinda works full-time at Charles Sturt University, Australia, where she teaches into the social work and gerontology programmes, and where she is a researcher in the Institute of Land, Water and Society.

Fiona Charlton is a senior manager of care homes across the United Kingdom. She recently completed a professional doctorate at the University of Sunderland, United Kingdom. Her doctoral thesis was a case study that investigated how the safety culture within a large PLC impacted on health and safety management, and compared the two main parts of the company: social housing repair and maintenance, and domiciliary care. Fiona is deeply interested in the experiences of doctoral students and in qualitative research methods.

Gina Curró was employed, at the time of writing her chapter in this book, as an educational developer (Research) at Victoria University in Melbourne, Australia. Her research interests include identity and agency in doctoral students, genre pedagogy and the integration of academic research literacies into diverse disciplinary fields and cross-cultural contexts.

Geoff Danaher is an independent scholar living in Yeppoon, Australia, and also a retired academic who worked previously in the enabling STEPS programme at the Rockhampton campus of Central Queensland University, Australia. He has research interests in enabling education,

environmental consciousness raising, gender and sport, and lifelong learning. He is a co-author of *Understanding Bourdieu* (2002) and *Understanding Foucault: A critical introduction* (2nd edition, 2012), and also a co-author of *Researching Education with Marginalized Communities* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

Mike Danaher is Senior Lecturer in Geography and History, and a recent head of the Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Arts (Honours) and Diploma of Arts courses, in the School of Education and the Arts at the Rockhampton campus of Central Queensland University, Australia. His research interests include education research, environmental education and policy-making, and Japanese history and politics. He is the sole author of *Environmental Politics in Japan: The Case of Wildlife Preservation* (2008), and a co-author of *Researching Education with Marginalized Communities* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

Patrick Alan Danaher is Professor (Educational Research) in the School of Education at the Toowoomba campus of the University of Southern Queensland, Australia. He is also an adjunct professor in the School of Education and the Arts at Central Queensland University, and in the Division of Tropical Environments and Societies at James Cook University, both in Australia, as well as being Docent in Social Justice and Education at the University of Helsinki, Finland. His research interests include the education of occupationally mobile communities; education research ethics, methods, politics and theories; and academics', educators' and researchers' work and identities.

Lucas A. DeWitt is Director of Teacher Leadership, Curriculum and Instruction for Graduate Programs at Buena Vista University in the United States, has previously served as an elementary and high school principal for 15 years and supports current administrators as an instructional coach. He was honoured as the 2013 Iowa Elementary Principal of the Year, and he received the National Association of Elementary School Principals Doctoral Scholarship. He received his Bachelor of Arts from Wartburg College, his Master of Arts from Iowa State University, his Superintendent Certification from the University of Northern Iowa and his doctorate from Nova Southeastern University.

Caroline Dyer is Professor of Education and International Development in the School of Politics and International Studies at the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. Her areas of research expertise include

education in international development; education and social inclusion; policy development; mobile pastoralists; accountability in education systems; and dignity and education. She is the sole author of *Livelihoods and Learning: Education for All and the Marginalisation of Mobile Pastoralists* (2014).

Paola R. S. Eiras holds a doctorate in Philosophy in the Sociology of Higher Education undertaken between 2017 and 2020 at the University of Surrey, United Kingdom. Her thesis explored the cultural identity constructions of Chinese students in a transnational university in mainland China. She is a postdoctoral fellow in the Danish School of Education at Aarhus University, Denmark, where she is exploring instruments of internationalisation in Danish universities. Paola has a background in both the biomedical field and linguistics, and she has been a mobile academic for more than ten years.

Dawne Fahey is a practising visual artist and a Doctor of Philosophy candidate at Western Sydney University, Australia. The title of her research is *Visualising Empathy: An Alchemist in the Landscape*. Dawne's research project is practice led. It makes use of autoethnography and arts-based research methods to explore the intersection among cultural immersion, empathy, trauma, personal meanings and storytelling. In her visual arts practice, Dawne seeks to find emotional depth in ordinary events and everyday objects and the extraordinary in the landscape that surrounds her. In doing so, Dawne's visual art makes sense of her felt experience of the world.

Daniel Ferreira is a lecturer at Sophia University in downtown Tokyo, Japan, and is a Google Certified Trainer and an Apple Teacher. He has been an educator for close to two decades, and he has served as an English language teacher and an instructional technology coach at several public and private universities in the Greater Tokyo region. Dan holds a doctorate in Education with a specialisation in e-Learning from Northcentral University in the United States.

Esther Fitzpatrick is a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. Esther is increasingly interested in the implementation of arts-based methods to respond to complex issues, in particular "writing as a method of inquiry" employing poetry, fiction, narrative and scriptwriting. A range of her work has been published, including collaborative autoethnographic poetry. She

recently co-edited the text *Innovations in Narrative and Metaphor: Methodologies and Practices* (Springer, 2019), and a special issue of *Arts Research International* on *Making as Method: Reimagining Traditional and Indigenous Notions of "Craft" in Research Practice* (2019).

Boni Hamilton was a classroom teacher and district administrator in the United States before pursuing her doctorates and retiring from education to write. She has published two books for K-12 educators and has a third book in pre-publication. Her research interests include elementary school writing, classroom use of technology, teaching multilingual learners, doctoral advising and doctoral ethics. She is grateful for the advisor card that she received from Jenni L. Harding during her first doctoral journey.

Jeanette Hannaford is a writer and independent scholar researching the intersections of literacies and identities. A member of the National Coalition of Independent Scholars, she leads the New York academic reading group, the Judith Butler Cocktail Club. Jeanette taught English, literacy and music before directing her attention to full-time research and writing projects. *Technology, Home, Gender: The Literacies of Third Culture Kids* is a study of 20 international school students and reframes third culture kids for the twenty-first century as "globally mobile children". Her first novel, *The Sparrow Choir*, continues exploring how global mobility impacts on identity and community.

Jenni L. Harding is Professor of Education at the University of Northern Colorado in the United States. She teaches courses in education research and mathematics methods. She advises/mentors doctoral students. Her students learn through productive learning struggles where they grow intellectually through multiple viewpoints of content, ideas and concepts. Her research interests include mathematics instruction, quality instruction for children, improving teacher education, diversity in classrooms, ethnomathematics, culturally responsive classrooms, STEM learning for English learners, doctoral advising and doctoral ethics. She has published articles, received grants and presented the results of her research at state, regional, national and international venues.

Bronte van der Hoorn is a project management academic and was previously Senior Lecturer (Project Management) in the School of Business at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia. Her project management research interests include the lived experience of project and visualisation. She has a growing interest in the scholarship of teaching and

learning, particularly the experiences of postgraduate students. Her research draws on Continental philosophical perspectives, particularly those of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. She is also passionate about the use of visualisation in research, project management and education.

Henk Huijser is Senior Lecturer in Curriculum and Learning Design at the Queensland University of Technology, Australia. He has worked as an academic developer since 2005 in Australia, the Middle East and China. Henk has published widely on a range of higher education-related topics, and he is the co-author (with Megan Kek) of *Problem-Based Learning into the Future* (Springer, 2017). He is co-editing *Student Support Services: Exploring Impact on Student Engagement, Experience and Learning* and *Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) and the Virtual University* (Springer 2021).

Natalia Kovalyova is Assistant Professor of Communication at the University of North Texas, United States, where she studies the relationships between discourse and power in a variety of contexts from presidential communication to popular culture. Her most recent research focuses on archival practices in government agencies and aims at discerning the enduring practices of control over public memory, group identities and knowledge making. She is a member of the National Communication Association, the Rhetoric Society of America and the Society for American Archivists.

Vinod Kumar Bonu is a doctoral student in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Hyderabad, India. He is working on a dissertation entitled *An Experiential Ethnography of Randonneuring: A Study of Hyderabad Randonneurs.* His research interests include the anthropology of sport and society, fitness culture, lifestyle sport and leisure studies. He is a manga and cartoon aficionado, practises yoga and is an avid sportsperson, with running and cycling significant parts of his lifestyle.

Stacy Loyd taught in K-12 classrooms for over 20 years and now teaches research methods at Western Governor University, United States. Researching the doctoral advising relationships and ethics is an influential inquiry project for her as she strives to encourage transformative conversations at various levels within the educational system.

Suzanne Meibusch is a confirmed Doctor of Philosophy candidate and external student in anthropology at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia. Suzanne's research interests include the contemporary study of human society, sociocultural and medical anthropology, gender studies and the emerging area of fat studies. She is also interested in fat female embodiment, the study of violence against fat female embodiment, online ethnography and the study of discrimination and activism. Her Doctor of Philosophy thesis interprets the experiences of violence and the othering of women who are labelled as or who identify as "fat".

Alys Mendus is an independent scholar/casual academic in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne, Australia. In 2018, she undertook a project called "Come dance my PhD", which was recently published in the *Murmurations* journal. During her autoethnographic Doctorate in Philosophy, Alys lived as a van-dweller, constantly travelling, writing in/into changing environments as she was performing *School Tourism: Searching for the Ideal School*. She did not find it, but she did fall in love, moved to the other side of the world and recently became a mother.

Carolin Müller is a postdoctoral fellow with the Martin Buber Society at the Hebrew University Jerusalem. She holds a Doctorate in Philosophy and a Master of Arts degree in German Studies from the Ohio State University and a Master of Education in English and Art Studies from the Technical University Dresden. She was a faculty member at the CODIP at the Technical University Dresden, and she coordinated the international PhD programme "Education & technology". Her research explores music, film and the arts in pro-immigrant activist movements in Europe. Her work has been published in peer-reviewed journals such as *On_Culture* and *Border Criminologies.*

Deborah L. Mulligan is an honorary postdoctoral researcher at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia. Her research interests include the field of gerontology, where she has published and presented widely on older men and suicide ideation. Deborah has a strong interest in community capacity building through examining psychosocial groups targeted at marginalised societal cohorts. Additionally, Deborah has a strong interest in identity politics in academia, and in interrogating the notion of doctorateness and what it means to "do a doctorate". She is also involved

in grief studies and writes on the topic of bereavement and the death of a child.

Vanaja Nethi is an associate professor in the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and the School of Criminal Justice at Nova Southeastern University in the United States. She teaches research methods and STEM education courses in the Doctor of Education programme, serves on the Doctoral Dissertation Services committee and advises doctoral dissertations. She holds a Doctorate in Philosophy in Education from Cornell University, her master's degree in Science Education from the University of London and her undergraduate degree from Universiti Sains Malaysia. She has worked in macro-level educational research, and her research interests include online learning and instructional technology.

Gina Peyton is a professor at Nova Southeastern University (NSU), and teaches master and doctoral level leadership courses. Peyton earned her Doctorate in Organizational Leadership, specialising in Higher Education Leadership, Master of Science in Reading, and Bachelor of Science in Psychology degrees from Nova Southeastern University. With over 25 years of higher education experience, she has extensive knowledge in leadership theories and practice, ethical leadership, strategic leadership/research, leading/managing organisational change, communication, education, academic writing and research. Peyton is a dissertation chair and serves on numerous leadership committees. Peyton was named NSU STUEY Professor of the Year 2021–2022.

David Brian Ross is a professor at Nova Southeastern University in the United States, and he holds a PhD in Educational Leadership, Master of Justice Policy Management and Professional Certificate in Public Management from Florida Atlantic University, and his Bachelor of Science Degree in Computer Science from Northern Illinois University. He teaches doctoral courses in leadership, and he publishes on leadership, power, narcissism, stress, academic integrity, entitlement, mobbing/bullying, gerontechnology and homeland security. David was named Professor of the Year 2015–2016 in the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Naomi Ryan is an academic within the University of Southern Queensland College, Australia. She is a multidisciplinary researcher with a range of interests focused on marginalised populations. Her Doctorate in Philosophy research explored the experiences of marginalised youth who

completed their secondary education through flexible learning programmes and the impact that this had on their career development and wellbeing. Her research projects include exploring the challenges faced through the coronavirus pandemic by regional, rural and remote social enterprises that provide an opportunity for employability skill development for individuals with disadvantage. Veteran social connectedness and wellbeing are another area of interest.

Melissa Tara Sasso has a background in the field of education in both K-12 and higher education in the United States. Her dissertation topic was on narcissistic leadership and toxic workplace environments in all fields. She has written numerous international book chapters and has published her dissertation, entitled *How Narcissists Cannot Hold an Organization Together: A Mixed Method Approach to a Fictitious Puzzle Factory*. Her dissertation was nominated for, and won, "with distinction". Her publications are on the topics of higher education and narcissistic leadership, media and propaganda, academic entitlement and the dark web, and also mass media.

Anup Shrestha is Senior Lecturer in Information Systems in the School of Business at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia. His Doctor of Philosophy work developed the world-first software-mediated process assessment approach in IT Service Management, and it was awarded the best Australian thesis in Information Systems by the Australian Council of Professors and Heads of Information Systems in 2016. Anup's publications have appeared in highly ranked academic journals such as *Information & Management*, *the International Journal of Information Management* and *Government Information Quarterly*. Anup's research focuses on the area of IT service management, cloud computing and knowledge management.

Peter Smith is Emeritus Professor at the University of Sunderland in the United Kingdom. He has supervised and examined over 100 doctoral students. He is a firm believer that the doctoral defence, or viva, should be a positive experience. Peter has spoken at conferences all over the world, published over 300 books and articles, and recently written a book, *The PhD Viva* (Palgrave Macmillan). Peter is Fellow of the British Computer Society, a chartered engineer and Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy in the United Kingdom.

Camille Thomas is a Doctor of Philosophy candidate and Lecturer in Anthropology at Université de Montréal, Canada. Her research interests and dissertation deal with entrepreneurs and the start-up creation process to study the individual in the workplace, as well as the rules and norms that take place during the process of creating a company such as conflict resolution, (remote) working conditions, fairness, entrepreneurship myths of the entrepreneur as a hero and the link among capitalism, individuality and wellbeing. She also developed the concept of a professional ethos especially for the entrepreneurs who create a start-up.

Robin Throne is a research methodologist and dissertation research supervisor at the University of the Cumberlands, United States. Her research agenda continues to consider doctoral researcher positionality/ agency and voice and land dispossession from the perspectives of various social justice research methods. She is the author of *Autoethnography and Heuristic Inquiry for Doctoral-Level Researchers: Emerging Research and Opportunities* (2019), and editor of *Practice-Based and Practice-Led Research for Dissertation Development* (2021) and *Indigenous Research of Land, Self, and Spirit* (2021).

S. Jonathan Whitty is Associate Professor (Project Management) in the School of Business at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia, where he has supervised numerous doctorates by publication to successful completion. Jon is passionate about incorporating philosophy into the doctoral experience to understand and derive new insights for management practice, and to facilitate a transformational learning experience for doctoral candidates, in much the same way that philosophy has transformed his own learning.

List of Figures

List of Tables

Disrupting Dominant Discourses and Celebrating Counternarratives: Sustaining Success for Doctoral Students and Supervisors

*Deborah L. Mulligan, Naomi Ryan,
and Patrick Alan Danaher*

Introduction

Discourses constitute powerful ideas about the world that often locate individuals and groups in particular kinds of relationships that in turn assign varying degrees of power to those individuals and groups. Certainly

D. L. Mulligan (✉) • P. A. Danaher
School of Education, University of Southern Queensland,
Toowoomba, QLD, Australia
e-mail: patrick.danaher@usq.edu.au

N. Ryan
UniSQ College, University of Southern Queensland,
Toowoomba, QLD, Australia
e-mail: naomi.ryan@usq.edu.au

1

in the context of doctoral study, students are sometimes positioned as being less agential and knowledgeable than their supervisors, who are seen as exhibiting superior competence in research skills and more extensive membership of scholarly networks.

From a different perspective, discourses represent often unexamined and sometimes mysterious elements of doctoral journeys that students must master if they are to achieve success. Counternarratives are necessary in order to provide doctoral students with an alternative positioning—one that locates them as successful managers in the formation of knowledge production and relationship building throughout the doctoral process.

This edited research book is focused on the phenomenon of ***deconstructing doctoral discourses***—that is, on the processes of identifying, analysing, challenging, subverting and transforming the taken-for-granted assumptions that frame the ways about which "the doctorate" is spoken and written, and that underpin the generally accepted approaches to planning, conducting and evaluating doctoral research. This deconstruction is crucial to shedding light on, and critiquing the practices associated with, doctoral students' and supervisors' work, and to interrogating who benefits from, and whose interests are served by, such work. From a broader perspective, the book editors and authors are committed where appropriate to facilitating the reconstruction of doctoral discourses that are more enabling, inclusive and productive for particular groups of participants and stakeholders in doctoral study.

More specifically, the chapters in the book are concerned with ***the stories*** that doctoral students tell and write about their work. These stories are vital elements of communicating and sharing the students' reflections on why they entered doctoral study, what they expected that such study would be like, their actual experiences of such study, the understandings that they distil from such experiences about the character and significance of doctoral study, and what that distillation means for their engagement with the multiple kinds of discourses framing "the doctorate". Furthermore, these stories by doctoral students are used to generate important lessons for the numerous ***strategies for success*** that doctoral students articulate and implement across a wide range of disciplines and researching divergent topics in order to finalise their doctoral research effectively and with impact. These lessons in turn yield new insights into the varied

constituents of success in diverse contexts at doctoral level, and consequently extend current apprehensions of the discourses related to doctoral study.

This introductory chapter is divided into two sections:

- A necessarily partial account of both dominant discourses and counternarratives gleaned from selected literature related to doctoral study and supervision
- An overview of the content and structure of the book.

Dominant Discourses and Counternarratives Related to Doctoral Study and Supervision

The rapidly growing scholarly literature focused on doctoral study and supervision (to which this volume is intended to contribute) includes an enhanced interest in exploring the diverse discourses that are attached to such study and supervision. Furthermore, a significant element of that interest lies in identifying the dominant discourses attending doctoral research, which entails situating such research in the broader economic, political and sociocultural contexts in which it is located. In particular, dominant discourses generally signify power—productive power to generate intended outcomes, yet also power over individuals and groups who for varied reasons diverge from mainstream understandings of the purposes and effects of doctoral research.

In this vein, it was instructive that the comparative critical review by Bastallich (2017) of journal articles about doctoral supervision in Australia, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom highlighted increasing commonalities across what are in other respects four highly diverse countries. These commonalities accentuated the growing reach of dominant discourses of doctoral research clustered around "the conception of supervisors as distant masters with sole responsibility for research outcomes", and also focused on "a de-contextualised, psychological lens [that] dominates educational thought about research education and innovation" (p. 1145).

More specifically, and writing against the grain of doctoral research in a Scottish university influenced by growing government policy intervention, Holligan (2005) named several dominant discourses that became apparent during his supervision of a mature aged doctoral student originally from overseas. These discourses were centred on notions of

"performativity and commercialization which now, arguably, exercise a controlling influence over significant parts of higher education" (p. 267). Holligan elaborated the deleterious effects of such dominant discourses for doctoral students and supervisors alike:

> …the utilization of a largely quantitative discourse of centralized success criteria, imposed by these highly politicized bureaucracies, may pose unavoidable ethical dilemmas for doctoral supervisors, some of whom may feel compelled to "over-direct" students' research development in order to ensure successful completion. (p. 268)

Holligan contrasted these dominant and deleterious discourses with what he termed "'old' discourses" (p. 268), but which we conceptualise as counternarratives to dominant discourses, including "freedom and autonomy…and independence" (p. 275).

From a different perspective, Bradbury-Jones et al. (2007) presented a fascinating exploration of how "unity and detachment" (p. 85) functioned as dominant discourses in their analysis of their relationship as doctoral student and supervisors, and yet also shifted significantly over the course of that relationship. For instance, "unity" referred initially to the two supervisors acting in unison in relation to the student, and then changed to reflect a growing sense of mutual identification among the three supervisory team members. Similarly, "detachment" altered from denoting the student's potential exclusion from decision-making initiated by the supervisors to signify instead the student's increasing confidence and independence as a scholar in her own right. The authors distilled this distinctive variation on the tensions between dominant discourses and counternarratives posited above as follows:

> The findings reveal that at the beginning of the doctoral relationship Sally and Fiona were united in relation to Caroline's relatively detached position as a novice research student….As the relationship developed, it became less hierarchical and more negotiated. Joint publications, developing friendships, and preparation for examination collectively reflected a strong discourse of unity. Thus, discourses of unity and detachment operated in tandem, albeit in different forms throughout the period of our analysis. (pp. 90–91)

Drawing on different ideas again, yet still proffering a particular interpretation of the discursive interplay between dominant discourses and

counternarratives, Boud and Lee (2005) articulated a provocative synthesis of the effects of such dominant discourses related to doctoral research gleaned through their shared interest in pedagogies:

> Within current dominant accounts students are relentlessly individualized. Almost exclusively emphasis is placed on supervision and improving supervisory practices or providing resources to research students, placing them in active research environments and reporting on their performance. The external policy pressures are multiple and contradictory, focusing on completion, but also on preparation for actual research practice postgraduation. The individualizing of research students … has been sedimented into institutional practices for many years, including in institutionally governed competition for places and scholarships, in individual achievement, in working one-to-one with one's supervisor and in unease with collaborative projects. These practices configure the student as a separate individual, a discrete unit and not a member of a group of peers or a research community. (p. 512)

For Boud and Lee (2005), the most effective counternarrative to these negative dominant discourse effects of doctoral students being "relentlessly individualized" (p. 512) lay in a very different conceptualisation of doctoral study and supervision, one centred on the alternative discourse of peer learning:

> We here take up a discourse of "peer learning" as a pedagogical discourse, which allows a particular kind of investigation of the research "environment" as an explicitly pedagogical space. While the research environment has been typically seen in terms of "departmental support" and resourcing of infrastructure, attention to this environment through frames such as peer learning begins the task of building a more complex and thoughtful learning ecology. (pp. 503–504)

The authors used their account to argue for more critically understood, and more rigorously theorised, conceptualisations of both peer learning and research supervision, with "peer" having a greater range of roles and a heightened degree of productive influence compared with the status quo.

Drawing explicitly on the article by Boud and Lee (2005) referenced above, Fenge (2012) elaborated one among several potential corollaries of the argument posited in that article: group supervision of doctoral students. From the perspective of that argument, it was pertinent that Fenge

constructed the rationale for group supervision against the grain of the existing usual supervisory practices:

> The dominant pedagogical practices within more conventional PhDs may be seen as those of individual study, and a supervisory relationship with an individual or team of supervisors who have been through the doctoral process themselves….This is often seen as a "privatised and personalised" relationship (Lee and Green 1998, 5). (p. 403)

While such supervisory relationships can be effective and ethical, they can also lend themselves to potential negative power being enacted over doctoral students, with limited recourse being available to the latter to challenge that enactment. Such a scenario is consistent with many of the dominant discourses identified to this point in the chapter, and with an undermining of the agency and autonomy of doctoral students. For Fenge (2012), the most powerful antidote to that troubling scenario was the model of group supervision modelled by her colleagues and her across three cohorts in a professional doctoral programme in a British university. While the model had several elements and evolved over time, its principal features were underpinned by a number of clearly defined discourses, including cohortness, creativity, peer learning and peer support, all of which ran counter to the individualisation and politicisation evident in most if not all of the dominant discourses analysed above.

Vehviläinen and Löfström (2016) also drew on the work of Boud and Lee (2005) in their analysis of 44 learning tasks prepared by doctoral and research master supervisors in a Finnish university. The authors elicited a dominant discourse from their analysis: "*A traditional supervisory discourse*" (p. 508; *italics in the original*) with six distinguishing features of that discourse, as follows:

(1) Supervision is mainly depicted as the activity and responsibility of a single supervisor.
(2) The main supervisory interventions that are explicitly discussed are advice and feedback on text drafts.
(3) It is considered a distraction that the students are different and have different competencies, aptitudes, working pace and needs.
(4) The ethical principle of fairness is operationalised as the norm to spend equal amounts of time with each student, which causes frustration to the supervisor and does not work in practice.

(5) The discourse of connecting the success of supervision solely to students' attributes is apparent in the notion that supervision works well when the students are highly talented, self-reliant, "ideal types" and especially in the concern of how to identify the best "student material" and predict their success.

(6) The discourse of "academic excellence" attributes the expertise of supervision merely to the research skills and academic expertise of the supervisor and cites the high quality of a dissertation as the only potential indicator of successful supervisory process. (pp. 519–520)

While valuable work and mutually beneficial relationships can attend and result from this "*traditional supervisory discourse*" (Vehviläinen & Löfström, 2016, p. 508; *italics in the original*), it can also clearly generate inefficient and unethical relationships and undesirable outcomes. The authors contrasted this dominant discourse with what they termed "an aspiring *process-orientated dialogical supervision discourse*" (p. 508; *italics in the original*) with the following, very different characteristics:

(1) The expectation that most teachers have of themselves is of being responsible for influencing a student's work and learning process (issues such as motivation, self-esteem, work habits, planning, realistic goal-setting, etc.).

(2) The idea of "being on the student's side" is evident in (a) distancing oneself from authoritarian supervision by being the "humane teacher": "I'm friendly, approachable, I can listen and maintain good interaction" and (b) an orientation to the imperative of being in the service of the student's learning process and expressing a general willingness to be so involved.

(3) Various descriptions in which teachers show that they have created a local pedagogical intervention to tackle a supervisory problem (i.e. pedagogical practices focused on supporting the process).

(4) The emerging group orientation (in the rewards or smoothly functioning supervisory practices): in some cases, the teacher takes up the responsibility of facilitating the group process in supervision, enabling the group as a whole to supervise their peers. (p. 520)

Given the continuing impact of the Covid-19 global pandemic on formal education at all levels, including doctoral study and supervision, it is instructive to consider the findings of a systematic literature review by

Gray and Crosta (2019) of approaches to online doctoral supervision. From that viewpoint, the three themes elicited by the authors from their review—"Enculturation; Emancipation; and Healthy Relationship[s]" (p. 173), which also derived from the earlier work of Lee (2012)—can be seen as manifesting the interplay between dominant discourses and counternarratives in particular kinds of ways, including in the distinctive contexts of online education.

Again from the perspective of a distinctive cohort of doctoral students, Doyle et al. (2018) investigated the experiences of African international doctoral students in two universities in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In addition to challenging deficit views of these students as being at risk, what emerged was the realisation of the significant impact on students' speaking and writing, and on supervisors' efforts to assist those outcomes, of multiple "Englishes", including "African English", "New Zealand English" and "academic English" in relation to doctoral writing. Intriguingly, given that dominant discourses and counternarratives are generally posited as being in opposition to each other, the authors recommended strategies for bringing together in a dynamic and fruitful partnership two distinct sets of discourses that could otherwise be positioned as being in conflict with each other:

> These issues suggest that it would be useful for supervisors and students to discuss different approaches to writing in English/ses and for supervisors to learn more about their African students' experiences of writing in English…. This is not an argument to not continue teaching African students the rules of the existing Northern-/Western-dominated academic game. Rather, it is an argument for creating more space for African voices, while *at the same time* making current academic practices more explicit for African students. (p. 11; *italics in the original*)

These recommendations resonated strongly with the argument by Andrews and Fay (2020) that "researcher education should foreground language more than is currently evident in some Anglophone higher education contexts, and that this can be framed in terms of plurilingualism and translingual practice" (p. 188) (see also Casanave, 2019, and also Padmanabhan & Rossetto, 2017, who highlighted the value of English language writing advisors being included in supervisory teams for doctoral students for whom English is not their first language).

Finally in this selective review of scholarly literature pertaining to doctoral study and supervision, another distinct group of doctoral students

manifested a clash between broader and competing discourses. In a study of mid and later career doctoral students in the social sciences in Australia, Robertson (2017) asserted baldly: "the current discourse of developing work-readiness skills of doctoral students is misplaced for the growing cohort of mid and late career students", largely because "this discourse serves to reinforce a deficit model where prior knowledge and experience are undervalued" (p. 560). Moreover, the deleterious effect of this model is that it "impacts negatively on the self-efficacy of this cohort by undermining established professional identities and consequently diminishing agency" (p. 560). By contrast, the author contended that both students and supervisors in this particular cohort could benefit when "Supervisors who recognised and valued the industry and life knowledge and skills and articulated a willingness to learn from the mid and late career students, enhanced the identities of their students and contributed to the student's self-efficacy" (p. 568).

In this section of the chapter, we have deployed selected studies taken from the doctoral study and supervision literature to identify some of the dominant discourses framing contemporary doctoral education. Sometimes, these dominant discourses are clustered around the institutional authority and the personal power of doctoral supervisors, which can be mobilised for ethical and productive purposes, but which can also generate unethical and unhealthy relationships. These dominant discourses can also derive from, and be used to drive, wider forces such as managerialist and neoliberal enactments of government policies (Manathunga, 2019; Pratt & Shaughnessy, 2021) that can render both doctoral students and supervisors powerless and responsive to others' agendas. By contrast, the literature revealed also more enabling and ethical counternarratives that can facilitate healthy self-efficacy for doctoral students and supervisors alike, as well as productive outcomes for doctoral researchers, research participants and other stakeholders.

More broadly, this contrast between these different kinds of discourses attending doctoral research highlights the value of narratives and stories, taking diverse forms, in analysing these often implicit and invisible forces, and thereby in giving voice to otherwise devalued and marginalised doctoral researchers. As we elaborate below, the authors in this book have taken up, vividly and wholeheartedly, this challenge of composing and communicating their powerful narratives and stories of their experiences as doctoral students and supervisors, and in the process of charting courses whereby demonstrated strategies for success can be envisaged and enacted.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the disruption of dominant discourses and the celebration of counternarratives to those discourses are neither automatic nor easy. Stories and strategies for success by doctoral students and supervisors can indeed take place and be transformative, yet to do so they need to be accompanied by policies and practices that arise explicitly from a politicised and situated awareness of the challenging and competing discourses framing contemporary doctoral research.

The Content of the Book

The global scholarship included in this collection represents the diverse selection of research methodologies and topics as well as the extensive scope of the chapter foci. In addition to the editors' introduction and conclusion chapters, the book is divided into three sections that represent a holistic representation or "story" of the doctorate. Chapters therein engage with, and where relevant contest, discourses based on the authors' experiential realities of navigating the Introduction, Body and Conclusion of the thesis writing process.

From that perspective:

Part 1 describes concepts related to the ***Introduction*** to doctoral study.

Part 2 represents nuanced reflections on the ***Body*** of doctoral study.

Part 3 offers viewpoints around the ***Conclusion*** to doctoral study.

Accordingly, Table 1.1 deconstructs the doctoral process by presenting relevant organising questions to do with each element of that process.

Table 1.1   Organising questions for the book

Section 1 *Introduction*	
How do I….	decide on my original and significant contribution to knowledge?
	navigate ethics approval?
Section 2 *Body*	
How do I…	form and sustain relationships?
	operationalise the study?
	write the thesis?
	develop and articulate doctoral identities?
Section 3 *Conclusion*	
How do I…	manage my viva experience?
	prepare for post-completion?
	create an academic identity?

Just as each doctorate is in and of itself a complete story, so is the layout of this book. We introduce the doctorate with the basic questions that all novice doctoral researchers ask themselves before embarking on their project: "What is my original and significant contribution to knowledge? Where is the elusive gap in the literature?" Having decided upon their topic, candidates then often seek ethics approval. This process can be fraught with difficult decisions around philosophical assumptions and consent.

Having navigated the maze of preliminary paperwork, the body of the doctorate begins in earnest. Forming and sustaining relationships are an important part of the doctoral process. These relationships can include supervisors/advisors, peers and dissertation chairs, to name a few. Effective research projects thrive on productive fieldwork, structured thinking and the selection of mentors. Thus, operationalising the study efficiently becomes a major factor of support. The writing process is a multifaceted and multidimensional procedure. It can be problematic when not undertaken with a systematic academic schema and structure, no matter which research design is enacted. Building a dynamic institutional and intellectual doctoral identity allows a candidate agency and voice. This builds confidence and helps to promote scholarship.

Finally, with regard to concluding the doctorate, the student becomes the master and prepares to defend those ideas that have formed a major part of the student's life for the last few years. Managing the viva experience can be made easier by listening to those who have gone before and internalising the hindsight of others. Post-completion strategies for success can include elucidating doctoral and postdoctoral researcher agency. Likewise, emergent researchers can take on a new identity that looks towards a future of scholarship and collaboration with other similarly situated or more mature researchers.

Together, these three elements of the doctoral process—introduction, body and conclusion—combine to complete the jigsaw of doctoral scholarship and to interrogate many of the concerns that contemporary novice researchers encounter, and consequently they are potentially significant for understanding the institutional, personal and relational pressures of doctoral study.

We close this introductory chapter with a couple of notes about language and the editorial review process used in the book. Firstly, individual chapters reflect the different terms used in different parts of the world to denote specific aspects of doctoral study and supervision—for example,

"dissertation" and "thesis", and doctoral "advisor" and "supervisor". Secondly, the volume's academic rigour has been maximised by a systematic, two-step editorial review process. Firstly, each editor read and reviewed each chapter abstract independently, with the chapter authors engaging with editorial feedback if relevant. Secondly, the same process was used with the full text of each chapter, with chapter authors responding to the editors' feedback as appropriate when writing the final versions of their chapters. We acknowledge authors' wholehearted participation in this process, which was designed to enhance the clarity and coherence of each chapter and of the book as a whole.

References

Andrews, J., & Fay, R. (2020). Valuing a translingual mindset in researcher education in Anglophone higher education: Supervision perspectives. *Language, Culture and Curriculum, 33*(2), 188–202. https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2019.1677701

Bastallich, W. (2017). Content and context in knowledge production: A critical review of doctoral supervision literature. *Studies in Higher Education, 42*(7), 1145–1157. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2015.1079702

Boud, D., & Lee, A. (2005). "Peer learning" as pedagogic discourse for research education. *Studies in Higher Education, 30*(5), 501–516. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070500249138

Bradbury-Jones, C., Irvine, F., & Sambrook, S. (2007). Unity and detachment: A discourse analysis of doctoral supervision. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 6*(4), 81–96. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690700600406

Casanave, C. P. (2019). Performing expertise in doctoral dissertations: Thoughts on a fundamental dilemma facing doctoral students and their supervisors. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 43*, 57–62. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2018.02.005

Doyle, S., Manathunga, C., Prinsen, G., Tallon, R., & Cornforth, S. (2018). African international doctoral students in New Zealand: Englishes, doctoral writing and intercultural supervision. *Higher Education Research & Development, 37*(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2017.1339182

Fenge, L.-A. (2012). Enhancing the doctoral journey: The role of group supervision in supporting collaborative learning and creativity. *Studies in Higher Education, 37*(4), 401–414. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2010.520697

Gray, M. A., & Crosta, L. (2019). New perspectives in online doctoral supervision: A systematic literature review. *Studies in Continuing Education, 41*(2), 173–190. https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2018.1532405

Holligan, C. (2005). Fact and fiction: A case study of doctoral supervision. *Educational Research, 47*(3), 267–278. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131880500287179

Lee, A. (2012). *Successful research supervision: Advising students doing research.* Routledge.

Manathunga, C. (2019). "Timescapes" in doctoral education: The politics of temporary equity in higher education. *Higher Education Research & Development, 38*(6), 1127–1139. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1629880

Padmanabhan, M. C., & Rossetto, L. C. (2017). Doctoral writing advisors navigating the supervision terrain. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 54*(6), 580–589. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2017.1348961

Pratt, N., & Shaughnessy, J. (2021). The effects of managerialism in higher education on doctoral theorising: Time to think? *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 42*(8), 123–1138. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2021.1971064

Robertson, M. J. (2017). Ages and career stages: Considerations in providing support for mid–late career stage doctoral students. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 54*(6), 560–569. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2017.1355261

Vehviläinen, S., & Löfström, E. (2016). "I wish I had a crystal ball": Discourses and potentials for developing academic supervising. *Studies in Higher Education, 41*(3), 508–524. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.942272

Introduction to the Doctorate: Introduction

Deborah L. Mulligan

The two chapters in the first section of this book present the particular challenges faced by the novice doctoral candidate—namely, finding a relevant knowledge gap, and then navigating ethical approval to begin the study.

The first requirement with which the doctoral student is tasked is finding the gap in a specific knowledge area to ensure that the original contribution to knowledge is genuine and will further the knowledge base of that discipline. A research gap constitutes an area in one's discipline that is under-investigated and, as such, provides scope for further exploration. In Chap. 2, Geoff Danaher, Mike Danaher and Patrick Alan Danaher present three divergent strategies that they deployed when confronted with the task of generating new knowledge. The authors discuss this responsibility in terms of worth and according to their individual engagement with the area being studied. Each author tells his story from an experiential position of praxis in different academic fields. Through these exemplars, the authors highlight the need for doctoral students to examine the appropriateness of one strategy to the particularised circumstances of the thesis context and objective. They further assert the nuanced and complex nature of knowledge generation, and suggest that its politicisation and situatedness must be accounted for when considering best practice.

Once deciding upon one's research topic, the second major task to be overcome is seeking the approval of the university's ethics review board. Even though the primary aim of ethical approval is to protect the

participants, the ethics review board also seeks to minimise harm for the researcher. By obtaining ethical approval for a project, the student demonstrates that he/she has adhered to the university's rigorous standards and has the intent of conducting the research in an ethical and authentic manner for all stakeholders. However, ethical approval does not always go to plan, as identified in Chap. 3. Suzanne Meibusch reminds us of the importance of tenacity and determination when representing oneself as a researcher. Suzanne's complex and contested path to acceptance by the ethics review board at her university serves as a beacon for those researchers who are challenged and misunderstood by the sites of authority within a university. She reminds candidates to reach out to supportive supervisors who understand the topic and the aims of the research. Perhaps the overriding message behind this chapter is tenacity in thought and courage in completion.

Mobilising the Discursive Power of "Original and Significant Contributions to Knowledge" by Doctoral Students: Nuancing Narratives of Australian Historiographies, Japanese Environmental Policy-Making and Australian Show Children's Education

Geoff Danaher, Mike Danaher, and Patrick Alan Danaher

For Phyllida Nina Coombes,The wise woman of the village,Who made and makes us who we are,And who continues to encourage, inspire and teach us.

G. Danaher • M. Danaher
Central Queensland University, Rockhampton, QLD, Australia

P. A. Danaher (✉)
School of Education, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, QLD, Australia
e-mail: patrick.danaher@usq.edu.au

17

Introduction

The obligation to generate "an original and significant contribution to knowledge" looms large in the imaginary of doctoral students, evoking emotions ranging from challenge and curiosity to anxiety and dissonance. The character of such a contribution varies widely according to the student's discipline, location, methodology, paradigm, philosophical positionality and theoretical standpoint. Certainly, the requirement for this contribution exercises considerable discursive power over the work of doctoral students, their supervisors and their thesis examiners.

In this chapter, we explore how we engaged with the discursive power of such a knowledge contribution in our respective doctoral studies. These three studies traversed diverse interpretations of Australian historiographies (Danaher, 1995); politicised constructions of Japanese environmental policy-making (Danaher, 2003); and alternative experiences of schooling provision for occupationally mobile Australian show children (Danaher, 2001).

We contend that our separate approaches to demonstrating the originality and significance of our specific doctoral knowledge contributions were connected directly and inextricably with our corresponding stories about how we derived meaning from our respective studies, and also about our strategies for fulfilling this distinctive criterion in doctoral thesis examination. We link this contention with the broader argument that success in mobilising our claims of particular knowledge contributions in our theses was related to nuancing the narratives generally associated with such claims. Similarly, we assert that this wider argument demonstrates the distinctive character of knowledge contributions at the doctoral level, and consequently disrupts taken-for-granted assumptions that such contributions are unchanging, uniform and homogeneous.

The chapter is divided into the following five sections:

- A combined literature review and conceptual framework
- One section for analysing each author's doctoral thesis knowledge contributions
- A concluding consideration of the implications of that analysis for deconstructing the doctoral discourse about knowledge contributions

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The requirement of doctoral studies to generate new knowledge often induces feelings of angst, inadequacy and even panic——that was certainly our experience in our respective doctoral theses. This requirement is sometimes expressed differently according to the institution and the type of doctoral programme. For instance, according to Central Queensland University, Australia, where all of us have worked as academics at different times in our lives, "The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) is a course of supervised research and study leading to the submission of a thesis which makes a significant[,] original contribution to knowledge" (Central Queensland University Australia, n.d., n.p.). Likewise, for the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), Australia, where the third-named author works as an academic currently, "The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree is awarded for research which demonstrates that the student has the capacity to conduct research and make a significance contribution to new knowledge" (University of Southern Queensland, n.d., n.p.). Furthermore, at USQ, the PhD thesis examination criteria are as follows:

- The extent to which the student has demonstrated
  - Originality
  - Critical insight
  - Capacity to carry out independent research
- The extent of the contribution to knowledge made by the thesis and, in particular, its contribution to the understanding of the subject with which it deals
- The suitability of the thesis for publication (University of Southern Queensland, n.d., n.p.).

Discursively, these criteria connote the highest level of intellectual activity reflected in a sustained and systematic work of inquiry that results in changed comprehension of the scholarly field in which the study is located.

The scholarly literature related to doctoral study and supervision contains considerable advice about ways to understand such a task and to carry it out. For example, Pat Thomson (2015) from the University of Nottingham, United Kingdom, and creator of the well-known blog *patter* (https://patthomson.net/), wrote reassuringly, "I'm generally looking

for something much less daunting than a singular and originary contribution [to knowledge]" (n.p.). She elaborated:

> [O]riginality is taking the reader, and I'm suggesting the thesis reader/ examiner too, somewhere which is simultaneously familiar and not. Original thinking and writing defamiliarises and[,] in doing so, recovers a newness about the topic no matter how well trodden it is. An original contribution to knowledge offers the reader a chance to re-view and re-think the event/ text/phenomena in question. That's the kind of original contribution I'm interested in. (n.p.)

From a different perspective, Inger Mewburn (2016) from the Australian National University, Australia, and creator of the well-known blog *The Thesis Whisperer* (https://thesiswhisperer.com/), synthesised the advice of the Australian finance academic Robert Faff related to knowledge contributions by doctoral students:

> This is the distillation of your entire research project. What is the primary end point? How will it impact [on] understanding in your research area? It might be a cracker of an idea, or maybe your application of data and tools is truly unique. Whatever, you must identify a primary force that defines why your work makes the relevant academic community take notice. (n.p.)

Furthermore, Mullins and Kiley (2002) interviewed 30 experienced doctoral thesis examiners, and they reported that "a term used frequently to describe positive theses was 'scholarship', described by interviewees from all disciplines as originality, coherence, and a sense of student autonomy or independence" (p. 379). At the same time, the authors included two statements that should be encouraging to doctoral students and supervisors alike. Firstly, they wrote that, "For students, the most heartening information is that experienced examiners want them to be awarded the PhD and will go to extraordinary lengths to enable this to happen" (p. 384). Secondly, they concluded their article with the following words of advice from one of the interviewees in their study:

> A PhD is a stepping stone into a research career. All you need to do is to demonstrate your capacity for independent, critical thinking. That's all you need to do. A PhD is three years of solid work, not a Nobel Prize. (p. 386)

Finally in terms of this selective literature review, the third-named author of this chapter and a colleague (Eacersall & Danaher, 2018) presented the following examples to illustrate the diversity of possible approaches to identifying knowledge contributions in doctoral theses:

- Social significance (e.g., generating new understandings of diverse perspectives on a political issue that enhance social equity and inclusion).
- Cultural significance (e.g., raising awareness and consciousness of the meanings associated with certain Indigenous practices).
- Economic significance (e.g., helping to save a government department a considerable sum of recurrent funding).
- Practical application (e.g., changing the ways that railway sleepers are designed, made, laid and maintained).
- Policy implication (e.g., developing a new reading strategy for implementation in schools).
- Theoretical significance (e.g., adapting a key concept from an existing theory and applying it for the first time in a different cultural context).
- Methodological significance (e.g., highlighting that "ethical, reciprocal and respectful research" is enacted differently for different groups of research participants).

Conceptually, in writing this chapter we have apprehended knowledge from two different but interrelated perspectives. Firstly, rather than being a fixed and unchanging essence, knowledge is a social construction that reflects the assumptions and attitudes of its constituent communities, and that is open to reflection and refinement over time (see also Danaher et al., 2013, chaps. 5 and 6). Secondly, drawing on the seminal thought of the French theorist Michel Foucault (1972), knowledge is a discursive construction, which accentuates its fundamental relationship with power and with the interplay of the diverse and sometimes competing interests of the different groups who create and deploy that knowledge for divergent purposes and with varied effects. We return to this conceptualisation of knowledge at the end of this chapter.

Diverse Interpretations of Australian Historiographies (G. R. Danaher, 1995) (Geoff Danaher)

My doctoral thesis (Danaher, 1995) was entitled *Discipline and punish and the discursive production of Australian historiography*, and it applied selected ideas from Foucault's book *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (1977) to two influential works of Australian history: Volume 1 of Manning Clark's *A history of Australia* (1962); and Robert Hughes's *The fatal shore: A history of the transportation of convicts to Australia, 1787–1968* (1987). The thesis had two principal goals: firstly, to deploy Foucault's ideas to critique "the narrative politics informing Clark's and Hughes' construction of character, community and historical meaning" (p. i); and secondly, to analyse Australia's convict history through the lens of those ideas.

In working to achieve these goals, I made a number of claims of originality of thinking and significance of findings in the thesis. For instance, I argued as follows:

> The focus upon bodily forces has sought to show how Foucault's project might lead to a different understanding of concepts of ideology and signification from those which Foucault himself held, and which provide a basis for linking his project with that of other contemporary thinkers. (Danaher, 1995, p. 475)

This assertion could be interpreted as signifying an exercise in theory building, in the sense of extending Foucault's ideas beyond his own frame of reference, and applying them to new theoretical debates.

At the same time, my claims of original knowledge contributions in the thesis were tempered by my acknowledgement of Foucault's (1972) critique of equivalent claims when made by historians: "Foucault regards the knowledge communicated by this kind of historiography as a function of the particular discursive relations which prevail in society at that time" (Danaher, 1995, p. 5). In other words, I considered that I needed to navigate a personally authentic path between demonstrating my fulfilment of the conventions of doctoral thesis writing on the one hand, and remaining consistent with the alternative constructions of some of those conventions evoked by my study's conceptual framework on the other hand.

I found that I was required to engage in an equivalent navigation when highlighting the policy and practice implications of what was a conceptually framed literary analysis in my doctoral thesis. That is, I used a contention about the thesis' knowledge contribution to argue that I had assisted in bringing together knowledge domains that would otherwise have remained separate:

> So when contemporary Australians engage with their past and its writing, they might usefully direct attention to the politics of their nation's colonisation and the various instruments by which it was implemented, including the discourse of historiography. This is more than an academic exercise predicated on the traditional rationale for the study of history—that we must understand the past if we are to understand the present and the future. What it involves is a claiming of the space History has subsumed in its march: a space for critique, a space for reforming one's self, a space for thinking otherwise. (Danaher, 1995, p. 478)

Paradoxically, in writing this end part of the final paragraph in the thesis, I was conscious that I was deploying a discursive strategy to distil my reflection on the discursive significance of my thesis findings, thereby articulating that significance in a way that was consistent with the study's conceptual framework. This important point was synthesised by an assertion at the beginning of the thesis: "notions of national identity and community are products of particular discursive manoeuvres which can be analysed in terms of their will to power and knowledge" (Danaher, 1995, p. 10). In other words, I was mindful throughout the study that the apparatus of a doctoral thesis in an Australian university was predicated on certain assumptions about the character of knowledge, its creation and its representation that I was implicitly critiquing through my deployment of the thesis' conceptual framework. Rather than seeing this as delegitimising and invalidating my thesis, this kind of parallel application of the framework in both the thesis' findings and its demonstration of those findings actually reinforced the value of the conceptual framework and accentuated the thesis' broader relevance and utility.

I sought to express something of this underlying contradiction with this acknowledgement early in the thesis:

> Of course this thesis itself constitutes an intervention in the fields of Australian historiography and post-structuralist theory, indeed a transposition of fields. Accordingly, it explicitly resists a quasi-scientific reduction of

the heterogeneity of positions made available within the fields of historiography and critical theory to a fixed theoretical stance which claims to articulate the truth; rather I argue that any intervention involves the construction of a problematic place for a particular commentary. (Danaher, 1995, p. 16)

From this perspective, I positioned my thesis as making particular contributions to knowledge while also contesting the foundations of specific knowledge claims, including my own.

Politicised Constructions of Japanese Environmental Policy-Making (M. J. M. Danaher, 2003) (Mike Danaher)

My doctoral thesis (Danaher, 2003) was entitled *The influence on and effectiveness of environmental policy-making and implementation in Japan: The case of wildlife preservation*, and it investigated Japan's successive policies related to wildlife preservation, both domestically and globally, since 1980 (see also Danaher, 2008). The abstract presented several claims about the thesis's knowledge contributions:

This research is important for a number of reasons, but mainly it helps us to test a number of theoretical models about: policy-making in Japan; Japanese environmental diplomacy; social movements; and corporatism. I hypothesise that[,] apart from a common sense of purpose that binds the different policy actors together, Japan's poor record on wildlife preservation is a derivative of the way environmental NGOs have been marginalised and excluded from the policy process. … The research concludes that there is convincing evidence to support the hypothesis. The research also reveals the positive, although subtle, sea changes which are occurring in Japanese environmental politics in the light of the continuing changes taking place in both Japan's broader political economy and … the international community. (pp. ii–iii)

These posited knowledge claims located my doctoral study in a number of knowledge domains, including theory, policy and environmental politics. These claims were clustered around a specific hypothesis, in seeking to demonstrate or "prove" which I adhered to the principle of hypothetico-deductive logic commonly associated with positivist and post-positivist research, although both my doctoral thesis and my subsequent

publications were and have been attentive to the interplay of social constructions of existence often connected with the interpretivist paradigm, as well as with some elements of critical theory.

In working to support the identified hypothesis, I organised the thesis structure into seven chapters that largely reflected the aforementioned hypothetico-deductive logic. For instance, Chap. 1 situated the hypothesis in the context of a specific research problem, and also outlined the study's methodology and methods. Chapter 2 presented a literature survey that placed the hypothesis and its resolution in a broader scholarly context. Chapter 3 outlined a conceptual framework that synthesised a number of previously unrelated theories, including the interest group pressure model, social movement theory and corporatism. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 deployed the conceptual framework and applied the research design to present a detailed data analysis respectively at two levels: policy-making and implementation (Japan and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora [CITES]; and Japan and the Ramsar Convention concerned with the appropriate use of wetlands of ecological importance); and the grassroots level. Chapter 7 distilled the responses to the study's two research questions, proposed a theoretical reappraisal of the scholarly field informing the thesis and suggested directions for future research. While this thesis structure was largely linear and presented logically sequenced ideas, it was also comprehensively iterative by facilitating ongoing cross-referencing across chapters in order to articulate and illustrate assertions related to supporting the hypothesis.

As the conclusion to my thesis, Chap. 7 presented several claims about the study's demonstrated contributions to different kinds of knowledge. For instance, I summarised the evidence to support the hypothesis framing the thesis, which contended that Japan's generally poor record on wildlife preservation derived from the systematic marginalisation and exclusion of Japanese environmental non-government organisations from the policy process. I analysed this evidence in relation to the study's research questions as well as to the hypothesis, and I then used this evidence to propose a detailed analytical frame of reference for apprehending the main policy actors engaged in these conflicts. Moreover, I took the opportunity to conduct a theoretical reappraisal in the light of the thesis's contributions to testing several theoretical models informing the study. While this discussion was largely conceptual in character, it reflected my awareness of the nuances and subtleties that emerged from my analysis of the actions and interactions of the various stakeholder groups, prompting

my assertion that "This study shows it is very difficult to arrive at one model over others to explain adequately all government policy responses to all wildlife issues. In other words, policy-making is not as rational as these theorists would imply" (Danaher, 2003, p. 337), and my concomitant contention that "A key factor distinguishing different environmental value positions in society is the underlying environmental ideology and moral viewpoint" (p. 337). More broadly, towards the end of the chapter (and hence of the thesis), I argued as follows:

> Even though the international "green" movement had its origins in the West, it has not been a case of Japan passively following the Western initiative. The findings from this thesis stress that environmental policy in Japan has to be seen, above all, against the background of its own cultural and social development, and against dominant ideologies and ethical beliefs. In turn, this is crucial to an understanding of Japan's responses to particular environmental crises and issues. (p. 344)

Thus, despite the largely hypothetico-deductive logic attending my thesis's organisation, and its investigation of my stated hypothesis, the thesis demonstrated considerable evidence of theory building as well as of theory testing, and also of knowledge claims, rather than being preeminently rational in character, instead needing to be understood against the backdrop of the distinctive contexts of the economic, political and sociocultural environments in which they were situated. This was consistent with Japanese environmental policy-making reflecting particular political constructions and the heightened politicised actions and interactions of competing policy actors and stakeholders. From this perspective, deconstructing the specific doctoral discourse of my original and significant knowledge contributions occurred in parallel with my deconstruction of the discourses attending the analytical project with which my doctoral study was concerned.

ALTERNATIVE EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOLING PROVISION FOR OCCUPATIONALLY MOBILE AUSTRALIAN SHOW CHILDREN (P. A. DANAHER, 2001) (PATRICK ALAN DANAHER)

My doctoral thesis (Danaher, 2001) was entitled *Learning on the run: Traveller education for itinerant show children in coastal and western Queensland*, and it focused on the schooling experiences of these occupationally mobile children and their families, and also on the experiences of the teachers from the Brisbane School of Distance Education who at that time provided education to the children (see also Danaher, 1998). As with the two other theses being analysed here, my thesis abstract presented certain claims about knowledge contributions:

> The thesis's major finding is that the show people's resistance and transformation of their marginalising experiences have enabled them to initiate and implement a significant counternarrative to the traditional narrative (and associated stereotypes) attending their itinerancy. This counternarrative has underpinned a fundamental change in their schooling provision, from a structure that worked to marginalise and disempower them to a specialised form of Traveller education. This change contributes crucially to understanding and theorising the spaces of itinerancy, and highlights the broader significance of the Queensland show people's *"learning on the run"*. (p. i; *emphasis in the original*)

Also like the two other doctoral theses being analysed here, my thesis asserted my contributions to knowledge at multiple points throughout the text. For example, the final paragraph of the final section (entitled "A Personal Note") of Chapter One emphasised my awareness of the impact of those contributions on my subjective understandings of the world:

> In combination, these two points—my conviction of Traveller education's potential contribution to theorising open and distance learning, and my focus on members of 'marginalised' communities—have had a significant impact on the way that I have designed and conducted the study reported in this study….In this thesis, my interest in delineating my own 'learning on the run' operates in parallel with my identification of the show people's educational experiences. (Danaher, 2001, p. 14)

This is a salutary reminder that, for most if not all doctoral students, engaging in the thesis design and writing process, including elaborating the study's knowledge contributions, is likely to have a profound impact on the candidate's sense of self, and moreover that such impact can in turn constitute part of those knowledge contributions.

The literature review is also a place in the doctoral thesis where a knowledge contribution can be posited appropriately, while also reminding us of the provisional and sometimes tentative character of our analyses of the scholarly field in which our studies are located. For instance, at the beginning of my literature review chapter, I stated that I sought "to position the study as akin to, and contributing to, the still small but steadily growing literature that emphasises the resistance and transformative potential of itinerant people and their education" (Danaher, 2001, p. 17). On the one hand, this statement was consistent with my clearly enunciated intellectual position from the outset of the thesis. On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that other researchers working in the same scholarly field might well deploy different lenses to analyse the same literature, and also that my assessment of that field might differ if I were to engage with it at a different time.

Similarly, I concluded the literature review chapter in my doctoral thesis by reiterating my identification of "two logical extremes in the literature on Traveller education [schooling for occupationally mobile communities], which I termed an 'unproblematic othering' and an 'unproblematic celebration' of itinerancy" (Danaher, 2001, p. 74), and I argued that these two extremes evoked "an 'either/or' dichotomy in the field" (p. 74). By contrast:

> This thesis … posits instead a 'both/and' approach to understanding itinerancy and [T]raveller education. … This approach has the crucial advantage of moving beyond the twin conceptual perils of fixed marginalisation and superficial exoticisation. Instead, the recognition of the deep and enduring links between itinerancy and marginalisation is leavened by an awareness of the possibility of resistance and transformation of that marginalisation. Even more significantly, this approach allows for a fuller appreciation not only of the education of the specific group considered here but also of 'disadvantaged' groups more generally. (pp. 74–75)

This summary of key points from my literature review chapter in my doctoral thesis elaborated my mapping of the landscape of the scholarly field in which my study was located, and it reprised my concerns derived from

that mapping. It also shared my identification of a potential way forwards intended to generate a new mapping of that field, and it highlighted as well that knowledge contributions can operate at varying levels of proximity to the study. Reflectively, I can share that the "fuller appreciation … of 'disadvantaged' groups more generally" (p. 75) adumbrated in my literature review chapter is something to which my fellow researchers and I have returned several times in many of our subsequent publications and presentations.

Finally, in seeking to distil my doctoral thesis's perceived contributions to knowledge, I essayed a hopefully memorable metaphor, inspired by my reference to "a very large landscape painting" of the schooling experiences of the children belonging to occupationally mobile communities in an invited presentation (Danaher, 1996) at an international seminar organised by the European Federation for the Education of the Children of the Occupational Travellers. Building on this "artistic analogy", the final paragraph in the final chapter of my thesis was as follows:

> This thesis has been conceived as contributing to *"the joining of the panels and the unveiling of the larger painting"* that depict the complexities and subtleties of itinerancy and Traveller education. The thesis's contribution to that enterprise lies largely in its delineation of some of the physical and symbolic spaces of itinerancy and Traveller education, particularly the marginalising, resistant and transformative dimensions of those spaces. The thesis has demonstrated how the Queensland show people's 'tactics of consumption', 'outsidedness' and 'creative understanding' enable them to resist and transform the marginalising spaces in which they are located, an achievement that reveals the continuing existence of, and the interplay among, marginalisation, agency and ambivalence for Travellers and Traveller education researchers alike. These, among others, are the important lessons of 'learning on the run'. (Danaher, 2001, p. 385; *emphasis in the original*)

This synthesising statement was intended to articulate an asserted specific knowledge contribution, at the same time as recognising that any such contribution was situated in a broader corpus of scholarship about this particular manifestation of alternative experiences of schooling provision, as well as valuing that corpus as having helped to shape my understandings of our shared scholarly field. From this perspective, the "artistic analogy" accentuated knowledge contributions discursively as being achieved by potentially countless antecedent, contemporary and future knowledge workers, of which scholarly community the doctoral student is one member.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have presented several strategies for the successful demonstration of our fulfilment of the requirement to have generated "an original and significant contribution to knowledge" in our respective doctoral theses. Those strategies, like the theses from which they were derived, vary widely in terms of the location in the thesis and the type of asserted contribution, and they reflect also some of the differences manifested in the theses' associated scholarly disciplines and fields.

A key contribution to knowledge asserted for this chapter is its conceptualisation of knowledge(s) as being highly complex and diverse, as being constructed by particular communities (including scholarly communities) and as reflecting the interplay of specific interests and worldviews. This helps to explain why a strategy for demonstrating knowledge contribution that might work in one doctoral thesis might be less effective in, or irrelevant to, another thesis: the two theses might be located in different knowledge-producing communities.

Similarly, this situated and politicised understanding of knowledge (and hence of knowledge contributions) accentuates the importance of doctoral students' effectively articulated narratives about such contributions, and also the need of being able to nuance those narratives, in the sense of recognising that knowledge contributions are sometimes manifested and mediated differently in different contexts and with different groups of participants and stakeholders. In diverse ways, each of us has presented our respective strategies for demonstrating knowledge contributions, and our accompanying nuanced narratives to communicate those strategies, in our associated research into Australian historiographies, Japanese environmental policy-making and Australian show children's education. In doing so, we have illustrated our separate and shared stories and strategies for success in both deconstructing, and mobilising the power of, the doctoral discourse related to demonstrating "original and significant contributions to knowledge" by doctoral students.

REFERENCES

Central Queensland University Australia. (n.d.). *Doctor of Philosophy—CL81*. https://www.cqu.edu.au/courses/doctor-of-philosophy

Clark, C. M. H. (1962). *A history of Australia (vol. 1: From the earliest times to the age of Macquarie)*. Melbourne University Press.

Danaher, G. R. (1995). *Discipline and punish and the discursive construction of Australian historiography* [Unpublished Doctor of Philosophy thesis]. Faculty of Arts, Central Queensland University.

Danaher, M. J. M. (2003). *The influence on and effectiveness of environmental policy-making and implementation in Japan: The case of wildlife preservation* [Unpublished Doctor of Philosophy thesis]. Faculty of Commerce and Management, Griffith University.

Danaher, M. J. M. (2008). *Environmental politics in Japan: The case of wildlife preservation.*. VDM Verlag Dr Müller.

Danaher, M. J. M., Cook, J. R., Danaher, G. R., Coombes, P. N., & Danaher, P. A. (2013). *Researching education with marginalized communities*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Danaher, P. A. (1996, November 16). *Educating travelling show children in Queensland, Australia* [Paper presentation]. European seminar on open and distance learning for the children of occupational Travellers, European Federation for the Education of the Children of the Occupational Travellers, Blankenberge, Belgium.

Danaher, P. A. (Ed.). (1998). *Beyond the ferris wheel: Educating Queensland show children*. Central Queensland University Press.

Danaher, P. A. (2001). *Learning on the run: Traveller education for itinerant show children in coastal and western Queensland* [Unpublished Doctor of Philosophy thesis]. Faculty of Education and Creative Arts, Central Queensland University.

Eacersall, D., & Danaher, P. A. (2018, July 19). *An original and significant contribution* [Paper presentation]. "Research Bites and Redline" webinar series, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Qld, Australia.

Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge, and the discourse on language* (A. M. Sheridan Smith, Trans.). Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). Allen Lane.

Hughes, R. (1987). *The fatal shore: A history of the transportation of convicts to Australia, 1787–1968.* Collins Harvill.

Mewburn, I. (2016, February 17). The research pitch. *The Thesis Whisperer*. https://thesiswhisperer.com/2016/02/17/the-research-pitch/

Mullins, G., & Kiley, M. (2002). "It's a PhD, not a Nobel Prize": How experienced examiners assess research theses. *Studies in Higher Education, 27*(4), 369–386. https://doi.org/10.1080/0307507022000011507

Thomson, P. (2015, May 11). What is an 'original contribution'? *patter*. https://
    patthomson.net/2015/05/11/what-is-an-original-contribution/
University of Southern Queensland. (n.d.). *Doctor of Philosophy (DPHD)—
    PhD*. https://www.usq.edu.au/handbook/current/humanities-communication/
    DPHD.html#programsummary

"I'm an Anthropologist, Damn It!": Reflections on the Challenges to the Ethical Authenticity of My Research

Suzanne Meibusch

> *You can't let people delegate to you what you should do when it's coming from way in here, you know? … I wouldn't let anybody influence me into thinking I was doing the wrong thing by singing about death, hell, and drugs.*
> —Cash, 2003, as cited in Adamopoulou (2011)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter journals my navigation through the ethics approval process at my university, which took the greater part of the year in 2019 and a total of three submissions. My story is reflexive and autoethnographic in nature, and expresses my thoughts and feelings throughout. Within it, I critique the system that I had to navigate as a confirmed Doctor of Philosophy

S. Meibusch (✉)
University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, QLD, Australia
e-mail: w0052408@umail.usq.edu.au

33

candidate, and I discuss the problems that I encountered during the ethics approval process. It is salient to mention that my research project concerns the subject of the othering of women who identify as "fat", and/or who have experienced fat embodiment during their lifetime. This is also a theme with which I identify.

Background

Befitting the description by Adams et al. (2014) of autoethnography, I am recounting my personal understanding of what happened to me regarding myself, my human ethics application and the human research ethics committee (HREC) that I encountered. I highlight the difference between my academic area of education and that of members of the HREC who made judgements on the worthiness of my research. My narrative embodies the "nuance, complexity, emotion and meaning" (Adams et al., 2014, p. 32) of my experience as I lived it. The value of communicating this story reflexively is that I am able to convey an understanding of a social experience that occurred to myself that could not have been observed intimately or directly by others (Adams et al., 2014, p. 32).

Tensions

Whilst sick with the flu, I read the email addressed to me that stated that my human ethics application was "not approved" and that it needed to be resubmitted. It was not officially rejected, but the scathing, value-laden comments that came out of left field made it appear to be. That evening, I looked at the comments that increasingly began to jump out at me. Some were reasonable, and some seemed simply outrageous and questioned the merit and credibility of my study. My research questions had come unjustly into interrogation, and my responses to many of the questions on my ethics application form had been inappropriately derided. The thesis of my project appeared to be disparaged, which left me mistakenly believing at the time that the resubmission that the HREC wanted was a completely new proposal. I thought to myself that this amounted to censorship. The dominant members on the HREC communicated an ideology that conflicted with mine on the subject of my research, which is "obesity". I felt that they had completely disregarded my philosophy and the essence of my research. The problem was that their perspective was bio-medical and mine was anthropological.

My immediate thoughts were that I could not fight this one, and that I was too tired to begin again with a different proposal. I thought to myself, "I just want to research and write". I also thought that the new personal computer that I had just bought for my research was a waste of money, and that I would need to remove my ResearchGate profile. Additionally, I had already used up half of my Research Training Program (RTP) Fees Offset position units (an Australian Government scheme that does not require Australian research higher degree students to pay fees for a designated period of their candidature), and I was beginning to think that my academic career was pretty much over before it had begun. More importantly, I began to think that the past couple of years of my university life in the Doctor of Philosophy programme had been a waste of my time, not to mention the three previous degrees that I had completed. After these thoughts had flashed through my mind, I thought, "Well, whatever is to be will be; I will just have to live with that".

Positionality

I was not, however, going down without expressing my feelings about the situation to my principal supervisor, who, unfortunately for me, had just gone on holiday to the other side of Australia. I emailed her with the hope that she might read her emails while she was away. I told her about the HREC's stance on the topic of "obesity", and that I thought that it was tantamount to censorship. I wrote that as a confirmed candidate I did not understand how I could achieve confirmation if my work were unsuitable for the university. I also added that "The last time I checked my address, I did not live in China" or any other country that restricted free speech.

I found the HREC critique to be predominantly unhelpful and intimidating, leaving me with feelings of degradation and humiliation. The following were some of the comments from the HREC concerning my initial ethics application that questioned the stance of my study concerning fat women that I deemed to be inappropriate:

- 5.1 Supporting "fat" towards a political identity won't address the endemic public health issue of obesity. How will this research be of benefit to the local or the international community? We need to look at causes of, rather than acceptance of, what essentially is a major international crisis.

  - 5.3 The Committee was unclear how point 4 on how structural violence as an "avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs", [as]

defined by Galtung, 1969, is linked in this research project. Is this saying that women are obese because of structural violence, or that obese women are subject to structural violence? If it's the latter, then the Committee is unclear how this research is of benefit to the Australian community where dietary risk is the number one behavioural risk factor for chronic disease.

7.1 "The community overall will be a better place and benefit from the positive aspects of size diversity". The Committee noted that obesity is a severe public health problem in this country. We do not benefit in any way from having obesity in our community. We need to support people and our communities to tackle our obesity problem, not try and make a positive out of devastating health statistics.

- 7.2 Is there a potential psychological risk with interviewing obese people?

- 7.4 The Committee queried how it will be determined if an interviewee is experiencing distress?

Concerning point 5.1, it is my contention that the committee did not understand or accept the idea that people can carry either an identity of "fat" by choice or one that is conferred on them without their consent. The committee stressed the idea that causes of obesity need to be examined, rather than accepted, in order to benefit the local and the international community because obesity is considered "a major international crisis". Seemingly, the committee had dismissed the framework of my study, and preferred that I study obesity from a preventative, bio-medical perspective. It also became very clear to me that the majority of the committee did not understand the difference between a socio-anthropological perspective and a bio-medical lens. Additionally, they seemed to dismiss the value of my study concerning any benefit to the community whatsoever, be it local or otherwise.

With regard to point 5.3, the committee provided this poorly referenced quotation that was not written by me within my ethics application concerning structural violence as "avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs" as defined by Galtung (1969). There was no page number or end-text reference provided with this quotation, so that I was not able to find its source. However, Galtung (1969) referred broadly to structural violence as "social injustice" (p. 171) whereby there is a "general formula" (p. 175) of inequality behind it. Galtung (1958–1973, updated 2009) also analysed how sociopolitical problems of "violence, misery, repression and deterioration" (pp. 161–162) affect basic human needs by placing such basic needs into five categories. These are "the most basic needs" of life and survival; "basic needs" of food, water, clothes, shelter, health,

education and togetherness; "near basic needs" of work, creativity, freedom, mobility, politics, participation and "relation to nature" of partnership. Winter and Leighton (2001) provided a reference to structural violence as argued by Galtung (1969) as "… any constraint on human potential caused by economic and political structures. … Unequal access to resources, to political power, to education, to health care, or to legal standing, are forms of structural violence" (p. 99; see also Schwebel, 2011). Galtung (1969) also stated that "violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic realizations and mental realizations are below their potential realizations" (p. 168).

The HREC did not appear to understand that fat embodied women can be subject to structural violence within a Western economy. Within my confirmation of candidature and my thesis, I have detailed my ideas of why women are subjected to structural violence within a Western political economy. My research includes how weight stigma negatively affects such issues as employment, education, relationship opportunities, social interactions, social mobility, mental health, appropriate medical care, housing and income, to name a few. The negative effects that I have listed concerning weight stigma align with the most basic needs, basic needs and near basic needs as described by Galtung (1958–1973, updated 2009, pp. 161–162). The majority of the HREC had doubted my research without seeing my work, because they seemed to rely on a predictable medicalised trope concerning obesity as a chronic disease as opposed to the critical sociocultural anthropological perspective that I am undertaking. They also implied that obesity is caused exclusively by behaviour, which contradicts the empirical research within my thesis.

Once again, the HREC's comment concerning point 7.1 reiterated their stance on obesity as a medical problem. They also apparently misinterpreted my study when they wrote that "We need to support people and our communities to tackle our obesity problem, not try and make a positive out of devastating health statistics". My study is entitled *Fat embodied women's experiences of direct, cultural and structural violence*. At initial submission, it was entitled *The politics of fat difference: How actors in the Fatosphere commit fat revolutionary acts, fat sedition and fat social mutiny in the fight to turn the social consensus toward fat acceptance*. The focus of my research, which is violence towards fat women and which incorporates aspects of fat/body acceptance and positivity, fat activism, "fat" as an identity and the Fatosphere, has not changed; only the title has done so. Further, I am not making "a positive out of devastating health statistics";

I am, however, writing about the lived experiences of women who have faced or who currently face violence, stigmatisation and discrimination based upon their fat appearance and embodiment, and of those women who identify as fat.

Underlying the investigation of these narratives is the notion that I contend that my study will reveal that fat women are exposed to cultural, structural and direct violence during their lifetimes. I deem this finding to be socially valuable in and of itself. My research does not cover the prevention, cure or reduction of the disease of obesity in society because I am self-situated within the humanities and thus, I interrogate a different stance and philosophy. It was very apparent to me that the committee members who wrote these comments did not understand and had no knowledge of, or simply do not allow for, a sociocultural, anthropological perspective of a human phenomenon that they considered to be specifically medical.

I considered comment 7.2, in which the committee implied that there was no risk with interviewing "obese" people, to be ill-informed because those who have histories of bullying, abuse and discrimination regarding their fatness may indeed suffer distress when being questioned. In relation to comment 7.4, I was very surprised that this question was even asked. I think that it is a very human trait to be able to tell when someone is distressed. There are many bodily and psychic responses when a person is upset, including a wavering voice, tears, shaking, anxiety that may affect breathing and other gestures. One can hear and see these things. If interviewers are not sure whether interviewees are distressed or upset, they can simply ask them. Comment 7.2 also seemed contradictory in relation to their remark made in point 7.4, which queried how I would be able to determine if a person were upset. It made me wonder why they would ask this question if they did not even believe that there was a potential risk to interviewing fat women.

Finally, I want to address the HREC's comment regarding my reply to point 7.1 in my ethics application that referred to how my study will be of benefit to society. My full statement in my first ethics application regarding this point was: "Benefits to the community include: an awareness of the fat stigmatization of women; an awareness of the personal and social suffering that fat stigmatization causes; the promotion of conversations about the violence of fat stigmatization; the encouragement of social change concerning attitudes about fat women; the acceptance of size diversity and ultimately human diversity. The community overall will be a better place

and benefit from the positive aspects of size diversity". When I made this statement in my ethics application, I truly meant these things.

Through the highlighting of the discrimination, abuse and stigma experienced by fat women during their life course, the pain of women's experiences can be exposed. This will lead to the promotion of understanding, empathy and acceptance. I believe that acknowledgement of human diversity, including size diversity, will ensure that any society becomes a more humane place to live because mental health will be more protected. Therefore, community health and overall happiness will result. This should be a place where the human stigma of difference no longer exists, and where all people experience dignity and respect. If this could be achieved even in a small way, people could live their lives less impeded by discrimination, and the community can become a better place both locally and internationally. Alas, the committee dismissed my opinion by reiterating the very familiar trope of obesity being a severe health problem, and implied that my study had no community or international value whatsoever.

Dyck and Allen (2013) noted with regard to HRECs that:

> The primary role of institutional agencies should be to advise and facilitate discourse on ethical challenges—not to review, "clear" or "approve" research. The role of ethics review is to provide feedback and propose strategies to researchers, not to approve the research. (p. 519)

It was strikingly clear to me that the HREC with which I was dealing, in what was to me their misinterpretation of their breadth of role, committed this faux pas in relation to my proposed study, which had already passed the confirmation of candidature stage. Allen (2008) noted that there were indications that the existing HREC method could be "distorting or blocking useful research", while lacking constructive influence "upon research practice or the interests of research participants" (pp. 114–115). I argue that these notions applied to my experience, in that my research was worthwhile and that I was indeed the victim of an attempted blockade. The influence that the university attempted to enforce was not constructive and not in the best interests of the potential participants in my research, as it could have deprived them of participating in my research altogether.

Gorman (2011) reported that a distraction of focus by HRECs by "other institutional needs, such as research governance requirements", may result in a shift of attention from "risk for the research subject to risk

for the institution" (p. 24). This may result in HRECs denying approval for research on non-ethical grounds because they deem research too risky, or because it may present the university in a negative light. This made me question whether this HREC may have thought that my research was too risky and would have represented their institution less than favourably because my research was viewed as supporting "fat" as an identity. It seemed that the idea of supporting fatness as an identity was too seditious, subversive, mutinous and revolutionary.

This is the official definition of a research ethics committee (REC) ironically recommended to me for reference by the university ethics committee (British Psychological Society, 2014, updated 2021):

> Research Ethics Committee (REC) refers to a multidisciplinary, independent body responsible for reviewing research proposals involving human participants to ensure that their dignity, rights and welfare are protected. The independence and competence of a REC are based upon its membership, [on] its rules regarding conflicts of interest and on regular monitoring of and accountability for its decisions. (p. 5)

I would like to emphasise the word "multidisciplinary" from this official definition. This is because one would presume that the academics examining a human research ethics application would possess scholarly perspectives from a variety of disciplines, including the social sciences. However, this was apparently lacking in my situation. If there cannot be other rationalised conversations concerning women's fat embodiment apart from an evangelised viewpoint of weight loss and healthism, women's social and cultural truths cannot be expressed concerning such issues as abuse and violence. Another point that was mentioned in this definition was that there are rules regarding conflicts of interest. I assert that there was an evident conflict of interest with regard to certain committee members' personal beliefs concerning obesity that contradicted mine.

As I noted above, the role of the HREC was not to approve my research proposal; instead, it was to provide communication on any ethical challenges to the data collection. I had already been through my confirmation of candidature and was an approved Doctor of Philosophy candidate at the time that I lodged my initial human ethics application. My research rationale and proposal had therefore already been assessed and approved by a group of recognised professionals in the social sciences and humanities.

My doctoral supervisors strongly believed that they needed to provide a letter of support for my research to send to the HREC. Their letter noted that the HREC had questioned the nature and merit of my research after it had already been peer reviewed during the process of my confirmation of candidature. They also included that Section 1.2 of the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007, updated 2018) states that, "where prior peer review has judged that a project has research merit, the question of its research merit is no longer subject to the judgement of those ethically reviewing the research". My supervisors remarked that the comments made by the ethics committee about my initial ethics application were outside their assessment and should never have been made, recorded or conveyed to me.

My supervisors recognised that the HREC's comments revealed an absence of expertise with anthropological research. They also commented that my research was fresh and innovative, fitting in well with contemporary anthropological research methods. They supported the fundamental premise of my study, and remarked how unfortunate it was that the HREC with their comments had displayed the same behaviour of prejudice regarding fat women to which my project was responding. My supervisors believed that the HREC had overstepped their authority by remarking on the validity and morality of my research, and that this kind of intrusion had overreached the ethical review. My supervisors were alarmed by the narrow, bio-medical assessment of obesity taken by the committee within their annotations, and by the implication that the basis of my project lacked merit because of its apparent endorsement of the "obesity epidemic". I am not a medical student, nor am I in the health sciences; I am in the social sciences. My academic training does not qualify me to be an expert in bariatric weight loss surgery, nutrition or obesity prevention. My perspective on obesity comes from a completely different socio-anthropological angle whereby I critique the myriad of social effects of rejection that fat or obese people experience.

Moving Forwards

Journal entry on 11 July 2019:

> Before I went out tonight, I said out loud to myself the following words: "I'm an anthropologist, damn it!" I think this summed up what I was

thinking at the time and that is that I am a fledgling anthropologist and I have the right to take the perspective I have in my research to obesity. I do not have to be silenced, nor do I have to change my perspective to align with a purely medical perspective. I do not need to change my topic altogether or the question and aims of my research to suit the ideology of some members of the ethics panel who support the medical model as the dominant discourse on obesity.

This was the first time that I had officially announced myself as an anthropologist. I had never known exactly when I could call myself one. However, it was when emotion welled up inside me while thinking about the value-laden comments on my ethics application. This questioning of the merit of my research caused me to articulate these words. I feel that this was the moment that I claimed my status as an anthropologist, even if I felt like I am a fledgling one.

As I noted above, I am studying the subject of obesity, and, while I personally recognise the co-morbidities of the disease, I am not studying this issue from a bio-medical perspective. I am referencing obesity from an anthropological perspective whereby I will ask the participants in my research about their experiences based upon their fat embodiment during their lifetime. This means that the purpose of my research is not to examine how to prevent, cure or even reduce obesity. My research is also not intended to promote obesity. It does, however, take a neutral standpoint of anthropological method whereby I study a social phenomenon or a group of people without judgement and with as little interference as possible. The only impact that I wish to have is one of academic activism and advocacy for fat embodied women experiencing discrimination, oppression, abuse or violence.

I have discovered during my research that obesity is predominantly studied and discussed within academia, social media and other public media with the aims of identifying cause, prevention or treatment. However, any discourse and research that fall outside the powerful and dominant discourse of bio-medicine concerning the fat embodiment of humans are on the other side of the wall, so to speak. Experiential knowledge from my research into social media, public media and academia indicates to me that there are general attitudes whereby opposing ideas are not taken seriously or respectfully. I have, however, encountered many academic writings discussing the harm of weight stigma and that support the thesis of my research, and there are many data to be found in social media

for my research. There appears to be a dichotomy of ideas. I feel that bio-medicine is on one side of the wall, and that I am on the other side of that wall.

This is a research wall of difference, and it can hit you in the face. Somewhere in my mind, I expected it, and so I was not surprised when the HREC made the comments about my human ethics application that they made. On the other hand, when talking about this point with my principal supervisor, we agreed that I should not have expected the particular paradigmatic comments made concerning my application by a professional academic group. The comments made on my ethics application by the HREC supported the bio-medical paradigm, which was on the other side of the wall to where I was.

On 30 July 2019, I submitted my second application to the HREC, and I attached the letter of support from my supervisors. Their letter of support commented on the HREC's lack of a cohesive reason for rejection and the lack of clear communication to myself concerning the rejection. However, my supervisors as well as myself initially read the comments of the HREC as a rejection of the framework of my research proposal because of the type of comments that I have mentioned in this chapter that were made by the HREC. This was why there was ambiguity around whether my research had been unofficially rejected or "not approved".

Journal entry on 30 July 2019:

After resubmitting my human ethics application this afternoon, I wonder to myself, "Are my answers enough this time? Is my application adequate?" I realized afterwards that I could have written the response that "I am not promoting obesity within my research" to the points of my submission that were ravaged by comments of critique concerning the subject of fat embodiment. But then I thought that I shouldn't have to do so.

While waiting to hear from the ethics committee, I am concerned that I may need to resubmit again if there are any more technical errors. What happens if they do not let me resubmit or, even worse, what happens if they reject or not approve my application again on the grounds of their own bias about the study of the subject of obesity? I think to myself, "Will the letter of support from both my supervisors be enough to fend off the ethics committee? What happens if it is not enough; will my supervisors need to go over their heads to someone higher in the university to lend an unbiased ear to my case?"

Will I be able to continue with my PhD at all? All I want to do is write. I should not have to be worrying about all of this right now; I should be

thinking about my thesis, refamiliarizing myself with it and making any adjustments needed to the first three chapters I have written. I feel frustrated because I should be putting my energy and time into practically and mentally preparing to enlist my participants and thinking about what I will be asking them and how I will be approaching them. In this time, I should be metaphorically applying the oil to my body in preparation for the performance of the ethnography. For this is the next phase of the ritual of the PhD and for this I must be prepared.

Journal entry on 23 August 2019 while awaiting review:

I feel angered today by the value judgements made by the ethics committee. I wasn't angry with them at first, but, now that everything has sunk in and I have spent many hours amending my application and the weeks have passed, I am angry. I think I am disgusted too, that members of a so-called ethics committee can cast value laden judgements and comments upon a student's research proposal that has already passed a confirmation stage. According to the letter of support from my supervisors which was sent to the ethics committee, the committee appear to have overstepped their rights by commenting on the ethics and merit of what I am proposing to study and also appear to have contravened the rules in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007, updated 2018)

Conditional ethics approval for my study came on 29 August 2019. I was thinking that my supervisors' letter of support, which was previously sent by them to the HREC and which I attached to my ethics application, must have had an influence. This was because none of the questions and remarks that I had received in response to my first application appeared in the assessment of my second application, and there was no further questioning of the framework of my study, or of the merit and medical morality of my research. But I discovered that I needed to submit yet another application! I could only hope that I will pass submission next time.

Journal entry on 18 September 2019 whilst working on my third submission of my human ethics application:

I am in such a funk. I have made some small changes to my document, but I can't bring myself to do any more. I just don't know if I can submit this document for a third time! I have to draw the energy and enthusiasm to be able to do this from somewhere. My problem is that I have been working on this confounded document for the entire year and I am frankly over it. I hate academic paperwork more than anything and I have trouble finding the enthusiasm to do things that I find to be constantly overwhelming to do. I

have had enough. I have learned a lot about the research I propose to do and how I am going to do it from amending my document the first time.

But now….

I am looking for excuses to quit it all. To throw in the towel. To exit this PhD degree. The ethics committee have blocked my ability to do any internet and social media research and are making me jump through hoops to do simple online research. I am being flummoxed about what type of observation this would be and was not given a waiver of consent for it. I am being queried on the proposed length of my interviews and made to feel that I should shorten them again. And the list goes on. Enough is enough. I have gone from "Okay, I can fix this document" to "I have had enough of fixing this confounded document!"

I am feeling rather angry at times and fed up with the ethics committee. After being in a slump this past month, I have been having trouble finishing my ethics document and working on it. With regard to some of the questions the committee are asking of me and some of their comments, I really think they are pranking me. They must be, really. They cannot be serious. This can take an emotional toll, because somewhere in my mind I think they are deliberately throwing ridiculous questions at me to stump me and turn me off going through with my research. Am I being paranoid? Or am I a victim of prejudice? Maybe both.

Emotional Toll

Before my third submission of my human ethics application on 18 December 2019, I was beginning to be depleted of enthusiasm, hitting problem after problem. The nearly four months making corrections to my final submission of my ethics application had taken their toll. I found myself in "Groundhog Day". It was gruelling, and I suffered what I can only term now as excruciating apathy. I missed resubmission to the next HREC meeting on 8 October 2019, and I felt at one stage that I wanted to give up on the application and abandon my research altogether. I was going through the motions. At the very least, I thought that my application was going to run into the following year. However, I managed to submit by the next meeting. I don't really know how. I think that I wanted to celebrate Christmas without this hanging over my head.

A strange thing had happened prior to my confirmation of candidature. For reasons unexplained, my confirmation and the title of my proposed thesis were not advertised publicly in the university's research newsletter along with everyone else's confirmation of candidature. I asked myself if

this were an accidental or a deliberate omission? I contacted the relevant section of the university as to why it had not been advertised, but I was given no explanation. Perhaps my previous thesis title may have been considered too outlandish because I was requested to shorten or change it by the HREC after I had lodged my first ethics application. After my initial human ethics application had been knocked back for both technical reasons and, in my opinion, inappropriate reasons of bias, I felt that I had been ostracised because of the theme of my research. Although my principal supervisor informed me that there were some members of the HREC who were on my side and had fought hard for my research project, I felt that my research was being discriminated against by the majority and, therefore, so was I. Where my supervisors had stated to the HREC that they had displayed the same behaviour of prejudice to which my project was responding, this had highlighted for me the academic discrimination that I had faced.

I believe that the violence experienced by fat people, and in particular by the fat women who are the focus of my research, needs to be communicated to the world. I was given advice by a sociology lecturer once concerning the de-stigmatisation of mental illness, and that was to make sure that I did not medicalise the subject of mental health within my work. This guidance is the focus of my research on obesity today. However, as I resisted the evident pressure from the HREC to medicalise my research, I faced challenges to the legitimacy of the message that I was trying to convey. These were the reasons that I had gone out on a limb for my research, and this had been the result so far while feeling judged by people whom I had not met and whose faces I had not seen. In the prequel to the post-confirmation stage of my research, it felt strange and weird trying to make a point and standing up for my beliefs, whilst swaying in the wind of academic disbelief. I will keep going forwards, however, because I have an imperative to articulate and publish these injustices.

Conclusion

Reflecting upon the strategies that I used throughout my unwelcome situation, I learned that my decision to reach out to my principal supervisor straightaway by email was invaluable. I learned that my horror about the comments made about my initial human ethics application was justified when my supervisors also read those same comments. This is not a strategy per se, but I am very grateful to have supportive supervisors with whom I

have established a sound working relationship, and who are empathetic and caring people. I would suggest that doctoral students strive to find supportive supervisors who believe in your topic so they too may experience the kind of advocacy that I have been given.

I also realised, after reading my supervisors' letter of support that was sent to the HREC, that the committee had indeed breached guidelines written in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (Australian National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007, updated 2018), whereby the merit of my research project was unduly questioned by the ethics committee after it had already been through peer review during the confirmation of candidature process. In addition, I believe that the HREC had contravened its own rules regarding conflicts of interest with regard to my project as stated in the Code of Human Research Ethics (British Psychological Society, 2014, updated 2021, p. 5).

In April 2020, I contacted the ethics department of the university to make sure that I had the details correct for this chapter. I discussed what I thought was the ambiguity around my first ethics application as to whether it had been rejected or not approved. I was told that it was "not approved" and was not rejected, and that the level of corrections and amendments required following the review of my application was notable. There were also aspects of the project and the description of its conduct and engagement with participants about which the HREC was unclear. I was informed that any communications from my supervisors were not taken into consideration within the deliberations of the HREC. Finally, the ethics department denied that any breach of process had taken place.

After I had contacted the ethics department in April 2020 to clarify my situation, I communicated to my principal supervisor that the ethics department had denied being in breach of any guidelines in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (Australian National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007, updated 2018), and that this made me feel that I had been gaslighted by them. This inspired my principal supervisor to contact the new chair of the HREC to familiarise that person with the saga of my initial human ethics application. I understand that this inspired a written apology from the new chair of the HREC to me.

After examining my initial application and responses from the reviewers, the new chair of the HREC apologised for the manner in which my review and feedback had been handled. The chair commented that the feedback that I had received had been unclear and contradictory in places,

and that there had been a misreading of my research that was contrary to "best practice". The chair recognised that there had been a lack of discipline-specific members to review the methods of the data collection and analysis of my research project appropriately. The chair, however, did not make any comment regarding whether the previous HREC had breached any guidelines in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (Australian National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007, updated 2018) when reviewing my initial ethics application.

The chair, however, advised that the new HREC was a different entity that operated under improved measures and guidelines to ensure that reviewers were suitably qualified in a variety of disciplines that matched the disciplinary expertise of the candidate. The chair recognised the innovation, significance, merit and benefits of my research project. I was congratulated for commencing notable work and given best wishes for the rest of my candidature. I was grateful for this apology, and I appreciated the recognition given to my research project by the new chair of the HREC. I was also pleased that the new HREC at my university operated under a new entity and had implemented a more refined process. Hopefully, this will ensure that future doctoral candidates will undergo a more fair and reasonable experience when applying for human ethics approval than the one that I had undergone.

I overcame a significant hurdle when my human ethics application was finally approved on 13 January 2020. In looking back, I think that I persevered because I knew that I had to do so, and I could not allow the previous 14 years that I had spent studying to be in vain. I knew that I had to forge ahead every day, putting apathy in its place, if I ever want to be called a doctor and to achieve my goals. From here, I need to put on the mask of the ethnographer and go forth.

References

Adamopoulou, A. (2011). Johnny Cash's last interview (August 20, 2003). [video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1zRFnw4jOU

Adams, T. E., Jones, S. H., & Ellis, C. (2014). *Autoethnography: Understanding qualitative research*. Oxford University Press.

Allen, G. (2008). Getting beyond form filling: The role of institutional governance in human research ethics. *Journal of Academic Ethics, 6*(2), 105–116. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10805-008-9057-9

British Psychological Society. (2014, updated 2021). *Code of human research ethics*. Leicester, UK. https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/BPS%20Code%20of%20Human%20Research%20Ethics.pdf

Dyck, M., & Allen, G. (2013). Is mandatory research ethics reviewing ethical? *Journal of Medical Ethics, 39*(8), 517–520. https://doi.org/10.1136/medethics-2011-100274

Galtung, J. (1958–1973, updated 2009). *Theories of conflict: Definitions, dimensions, negations, formations* [unpublished manuscript]. https://www.transcend.org/files/Galtung_Book_Theories_Of_Conflict_single.pdf

Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research, 6*(3), 167–191. https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301

Gorman, S. M. (2011). Ethics creep or governance creep? Challenges for Australian human research ethics committees (HRECs). *Monash Bioethics Review, 29*(4), 23–38.

National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). (2007, updated 2018). *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. Author. https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/national-statement-ethical-conduct-human-research-2007-updated-2018

Schwebel, M. (2011). Victories over structural violence. *Peace and Conflict, 17*(1), 85–99. https://doi.org/10.1080/10781919.2010.535138

Winter, D. D., & Leighton, D. C. (2001). Structural violence. In D. J. Christie, R. V. Wagner, & D. D. Winter (Eds.), *Peace, conflict and violence: Psychology for the 21st century* (pp. 99–101). Prentice Hall.

The Body of the Doctorate: Introduction

Deborah L. Mulligan, Naomi Ryan, and
Patrick Alan Danaher

The 14 chapters in this section of the book about the body of the doctorate are divided into four distinct subsections: Forming and Sustaining Relationships; Operationalising the Study; Writing the Thesis; Developing and Articulating Doctoral Identities. Each of these subsections provides readers with a different and distinctive operational aspect of doctorateness.

Perhaps one of the most critical aspects of doctoral practice is overcoming isolation. *Forming and sustaining relationships* with interested others provides doctoral students with support and helps to maintain wellbeing throughout the journey. In Chap. 4, Jenni L. Harding, Boni Hamilton and Stacy Loyd explore the doctoral advisor (supervisor)/student relationship. They conclude with pertinent recommendations regarding ethical practice when sustaining this important collaborative endeavour. The authors advocate ongoing stakeholder conversations, policy reviews and advisor introspection around transparency and decision-making. In Chap. 5, Gina Lynne Peyton, David Brian Ross, Vanaja Nethi, Melissa Tara Sasso and Lucas A. DeWitt interrogate the field of non-traditional dissertation students—that is, those who enter the doctorate at a point in their lives when they have previously established long-term personal and professional commitments. These prior obligations can be a point of tension between the student and the dissertation committee. The authors suggest strategies

for the effective management of these challenges. In Chap. 6, Carolin Müller examines the gendered nature of doctoral study. She discusses the power imbalances that render women disadvantaged in academia. Müller strategises a beneficial use of social media for female academics. She further highlights the importance of encouraging and engaged advisors who foster the rights of women working within the academic system and who provide effective role models, particularly for our novice researchers.

The clarification and application of philosophy and methodology can be complicated. *Operationalising the study* is essential for the success of doctoral research. In Chap. 7, Camille Thomas focuses on the methodological and ethical adjustments and strategies that she utilised when conducting her fieldwork. The author stresses the unpredictability of fieldwork praxis and presents an array of approaches that she employed when the unexpected occurred during her research that was conducted both pre and during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Chap. 8, Bronte van der Horne and Jon Whitty wrestle with the notion of philosophising the doctorate. They argue that establishing sound underlying philosophies strengthens doctoral students' skillsets and enhances their capacity for problem-solving and meaning-making.

Writing the thesis can be a challenging endeavour. Uncertainty around structural procedures, whether it is a traditional doctoral thesis or a thesis by publication, can create tensions with supervisors and promote writer's block. In Chap. 9, Belinda Cash presents an insight into the pitfalls that she encountered whilst completing a thesis by publication. She discusses the compromises and considerations that should be reflected upon throughout the process when publishing during the thesis writing phase. The author offers six strategies for success to ensure the simplification of thesis development when undertaken in this manner. The theme of thesis by publication continues in Chap. 10 with Anup Shrestha, who examines an "agile" approach to thesis by publication by doctoral students and supervisors alike. This approach focuses on four value statements that students may like to consider when embarking on a thesis by publication. The author points out that publishing articles in high-quality journals whilst writing the doctorate is a significant and challenging endeavour. Both Belinda's and Anup's advice to doctoral supervisors about how to manage this process with students who will benefit from completing a doctorate by publication is timely as well as beneficial to all stakeholders. In Chap. 11, Natalia Kovalyova debunks some of the myths around dissertation writing. She discusses the science of writing, and offers practical tips and suggestions based on real-life experiences. Management of the process of writing is an individual matter, and the effective application of technique is

essential for strengthening output and ensuring a quality product. In Chap. 12, Dawne Fahey, Esther Fitzpatrick and Alys Mendus explore the use of autoethnography and arts-based methods in collaborative research relationships to deconstruct and disrupt doctoral discourses. Their highly original chapter offers poetry worked as analysis and provocation for further writing. The authors initiate conversation through the utilisation of *ekphrasis*, and invite readers to explore this technique as they practise creating art in response to art. In Chap. 13, Deborah L. Mulligan interrogates loneliness, focusing specifically on the isolation encountered by doctoral students during the writing phase of their thesis. Deborah describes her experience of challenging loneliness through her connection with an online international academic writing group. The author's association with this group provided her (and her co-writers) with a sense of belonging and camaraderie. Not only did the participants write together, but they also partook in thoughtful and supportive conversations during the scheduled writing breaks.

It could be argued that finding one's "doctorateness" is a significant milestone in the doctoral process. This threshold concept involves *developing and articulating doctoral identities*. In Chap. 14, Paola R. S. Eiras and Henk Huijser discuss a multicultural and multidisciplinary perspective when constructing doctoral identities. They stress the importance of agency as a transformative element and the necessity for supportive and constructive collaboration. Effective supervisory relationships built on mutuality also assist doctoral students in defining their identities. In Chap. 15, Gina Curró examines the benefit of healthy social and emotional connections and the impact of these on skill development during the doctoral writing process. She argues that successful communication fosters students' sense of agency and identity, thus enabling them to grow intellectually and to improve their doctoral practices. In Chap. 16, Jeanette Hannaford utilises the metaphor of trilling when examining the efforts by mature aged doctoral students to contribute to scholarship and to the society in which they live. She compares the institutional challenges faced by older doctoral candidates with those experienced by their younger counterparts. She warns readers to beware ageist stereotypes and biases. In Chap. 17, B. Vinod Kumar reflects on his interactions with the academic higher education structure in India. He shares with readers his very personal journey of the challenges and triumphs that he has encountered physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually as he strives to complete his doctorate.

Ethical Doctoral Advisor–Student Relationships in the United States: Uncovering Unknown Perspectives and Actions

Jenni L. Harding, Boni Hamilton, and Stacy Loyd

INTRODUCTION

The doctoral advising relationship is difficult to define within one single construct, as it is multi-dimensional, with ethical considerations for both the student and the advisor. Harding-DeKam et al. (2012) defined doctoral advisors as "teachers who provide multiyear individualized instruction for doctoral students" (p. 6). It is known that advisors, sometimes called "doctoral supervisors", contribute to socialisation experiences and postgraduate options for their students. Advisors are often the most important person with whom doctoral students will form a relationship during their studies (Barnes & Austin, 2009; Gilbar et al., 2013; Löfström

J. L. Harding (✉) • B. Hamilton • S. Loyd
University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO, USA
e-mail: Jenni.harding@unco.edu

& Pyhältö, 2015). The importance of these complex relationships makes understanding the diverse ethical perspectives a valid undertaking.

Literature Review

Advisor as Teacher and Mentor

In addition to their roles as *teachers*, advisors serve as *mentors*. Mentoring involves the interaction between a more experienced professional (advisor) and a less experienced person (student) that includes attention to mutuality, comprehensiveness, congruence and ethical concerns (Gray & Jordan, 2012). Although nearly all graduate students report having an advisor, only one-half to two-thirds of students report being mentored. This distinction is because negative or dissatisfying advisor relationships are not conceptualised as mentorships from the students' perspectives (Schlosser, Lyons, Regine, et al., 2011a).

Expectations

Power and corresponding expectations exist in all human relationships. However, structures inherent within institutions of higher education create power structures that may unethically disadvantage students. This unequal relationship leaves open the opportunity for communication and ethical issues to arise (Barnes & Austin, 2009; Gilbar et al., 2013; Gray & Jordan, 2012; Harding-DeKam et al., 2012; Löfström & Pyhältö, 2015).

There can be uncommunicated and unmet expectations within advising relationships. The institution sets guidelines that frame the partnership, but both the student and the advisor have expectations for their relationships that may or may not be communicated and understood (Barnes & Austin, 2009; Golde, 2005). Negative advising relationships stem from "lack of respect, negative personal characteristics, research struggles, communication problems, advisor apathy and failure to solve conflicts" (Peluso et al., 2011, p. 30).

Ethical Principles

Previous research identified key ethical issues involving students and faculty members within doctoral advising relationships. Ethical issues include sexual harassment, "cloning" the student in the advisor's likeness, dual

relationships, exploitation, abuse, unspoken conflicts, faculty reward systems or lack thereof, intellectual property ownership, self-protection methods of faculty members, racial and gender discrimination, and issues involving student autonomy (Appel & Dahlgren, 2003; Barnes & Austin, 2009; Löfström & Pyhältö, 2015; Mutula & Majinge, 2015; Schlosser, Lyons, Talleyrand, et al., 2011b). This study explored the ethical context of the doctoral student and advisor relationship.

Methodology

Interest in doctoral ethics resulted from discussions in doctoral advising partnerships, and was pursued by delving into published research. Our research discovered literature in terms of doctoral research ethics, but little on relationship ethics. Therefore, we adopted grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) to understand the ethics construct within the advisor and student relationship. We entered the research field with broad ideas (Charmaz, 2014), and we sought to remain attuned to multiple possibilities (Puddephatt et al., 2009).

Participants and Setting

Participants. Data were collected from three categories of participants: students; advisors; and administrators (see Table 4.1).

Setting. Participants were recruited from education departments on four college campuses in the Rocky Mountain region in the United States. Pseudonyms were used for all colleges.

Data

Data collection. During the iterative data collection, we conducted preliminary analyses to determine emerging avenues of inquiry. Data were transcribed and coded through open, process, focused, axial and theoretical coding (Saldaña, 2016) in NVivo. We also wrote memos, exchanged emails and debriefed with one another where we adjusted interview questions and pursued additional perspectives.

Interviews and focus groups. The primary data collection methods were semi-structured interviews and focus groups (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The university roles of the three researchers influenced the data collection process. Harding, professor and advisor, conducted

Table 4.1   Participants by role and setting

Campuses	Graduate deans	College deans	Doctoral advisors	Doctoral students
Urban State University	David	Dwayne	Allen Alexa	Shaq Steadman Serena Shannon
Elite State University	–	Danika	Autumn Anthony	Shamira Samuel
Rural State University	Deborah	Derek	Ambella Athena Alawa Adelaide Anne	Sarah Susan Scott
Urban Private University	Darius	Dulce	Aaron Antonio Achilles	–

NB: All names are pseudonyms

administrative interviews and co-conducted faculty focus groups. Hamilton, doctoral student, conducted student interviews, conducted and co-conducted student focus groups, and co-conducted an advisor focus group. Loyd, university instructor with neither a student nor an advisor role, co-conducted student and advisor focus groups.

A convenience sample of participants was recruited through email and recommendations. Data collection from students and advisors occurred in intimate (2–4 people) focus groups on campus, or as one-on-one interviews with administrators. Interviews and focus groups lasted 30–90 minutes, and were audiotaped and transcribed.

Data analysis. Data analysis began with the first data collection (Charmaz, 2014). When the focus groups were co-led by two researchers, the researchers debriefed after the participants had left. The transcribed data were immediately coded by the transcriber, which generated questions to be pursued in subsequent data collection sessions. The authors met approximately one full day a month for a year, as well as communicating through email, to discuss emerging themes and patterns. Then the authors met for five full-day sessions to develop preliminary theories and to organise the findings for publication. Credibility issues were addressed

by using a second coder, expert/peer checks, triangulation and member checks (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

FINDINGS

Defining ethics has challenged philosophers for centuries, and our research has not resolved this challenge. However, we came to new understandings of the ways in which roles in the university influence how ethics are viewed. Participants' roles and responsibilities created contexts for their perspectives about how the doctoral advisor-advisee relationship should be shaped and managed.

Administrators' Contexts and Perspectives

Administrator participants unanimously asserted that university practices with doctoral students were ethical, even though they could not define ethics. Despite confidence about their programmes, administrators acknowledged that ethical conflicts occurred (with an annual average of six at the college level and ten at the university level). These disputes included issues of poor treatment: rudeness, lack of responsiveness, poor guidance (David, Deborah, Darius); sexual harassment (Dulce); failing evaluations: courses, comprehensive exams or dissertations (Dwayne, Derek, Danika), personality conflicts (Derek, David); and communication breakdowns (Dulce, Darius). David commented that "the advising relationship can be an incredibly synergistic relationship done well with clear boundaries and clear expectations. And it can be a freaking train wreck if not done well".

Administrators develop and enforce policies to guide behaviour. They are, therefore, focused on what is *right* or virtuous behaviour. Because of a belief that "people generally do the right thing", as Deborah stated, universities often "do not have any explicit, college-wide policies or training [for doctoral advising]".

Without clear policies and guidance, advising exists in a grey space where advisors make and enforce their own judgement, based on their personal ethical beliefs. This can lead to ethical conflicts, as Darius explained:

> Some people think it's okay to rent, to rent a rental property, to rent it to your dissertation advisee. In my mind, it isn't. It's not. Others would argue

with me and say, "Well, it is. It's something outside the campus." But it isn't, say, if that student stops paying the rent. Say, if you get into an argument over a broken toilet. I mean, these things just bubble over into each other.

Because programmes do not directly address ethics, administrators face challenges in resolving and preventing conflicts, as Dwayne explained:

I know some programs are very proactive about getting their faculty and the junior faculty up to critical mentoring standards. But we all know faculty … who won't listen to anybody and do it their own way, and the only resource or recourse we have is to prevent them from being mentors going forward.

Administrators learn about relationship breakdowns when ethical issues are elevated to the administrative level. However, based on the research reported here, students and their advisors often do not report ethical conflicts when they happen. Deborah mentioned that "Complaints about advisors, although present, are usually provided post degree because, I think, of a fear of retaliation". Relatedly, advisors lack an effective forum for their complaints about ethical issues with students.

Relationship breakdowns exact an emotional toll on both advisors and students. The advising relationship forms a *professional family*, including all the advantages and frustration within this emotional bond. Danika explained: "They had a deep relationship because of shared affinity for the work and a certain activism around work; therefore, when the issue of quality arose … it caused the same kind of rift it would cause in a … marriage".

Another issue related to the professional family is the unequal balance of power between parents and children. Dwayne acknowledged the "power differential between… doctoral students and faculty" that leads to student vulnerability within the relationship.

Faculty Advisors' Contexts and Perspectives

The advisors believed that they did what was best for students as they guided them through their programmes and dissertation processes. Advisors (and administrators who had been advisors) acknowledged that their doctoral advising was based on their own student experiences. Sometimes their advisors had been positive role models who inspired them

to treat students in similar ways, as Achilles described: "For me literally, 100% of the time I refer to my extremely positive and successful experience as a doc[toral] student. So I feel it is a quality experience to draw from".

Sometimes the advisory relationship had been a negative experience and resulted in deliberate decisions not to replicate the bad relationship, as Alexa elaborated:

> I definitely drew on my experience as a doctoral student. … I had a very negative experience with my advisor, and I was the first doctoral dissertation that this professor had advised, and she had a very hands-off approach. … You know, she was aloof, very remote, very unsupportive, and I try essentially to be the opposite of that person.

However, students noted the disparity in how they were acculturated into their doctoral programmes, as Shaq explained:

> It's very different in different departments and how it plays out. Just what the traditions are in different departments and what their advisors have gone through as students and what their advisors went through, and their advisors and their advisors. So that kind of lineage of ethical decisions and actions that have taken place. Depending on where you lie, you're going to have a different ethical experience than your peer, your colleague.

This then creates a *lineage of advising* where students are handed down traditions and experiences based on the practices of their advisors and their advisors before them (Knox et al., 2006). The effect of one advisor on one doctoral student who then becomes a doctoral advisor may seem insignificant, but advisors manage many students over years of a professorship. Each student has the potential to pass along the practices to many more. The 12 advisors (Allen, Alexa, Autumn, Anthony, Ambella, Athena, Alawa, Adelaide, Anne, Aaron, Antonio, Achilles) who participated in this research study had collectively chaired 297 doctoral student committees without any formal training on how to advise students (Harding-DeKam et al., 2012).

Professional family is seen through mentorship as being similar to parenting by both advisors and students:

> You know they [students] have come in, they're naïve, they're enthusiastic, it's a blank slate, it's fresh meat. … You want them to start challenging you

so that, when they leave, you're proud. I've produced my child all grown up. (Aaron)

I was not feeling confident in what I was saying to them [doctoral committee]. It was very much the weak young child trying to speak to the powerful adult. (Shaq)

Without policies, advisors have to decide how to support their students. Allen explained:

[Students] have to be coached, and so the issue is what kind of help do you provide? How much help do you provide? You know, you don't want to be in a position of giving so much guidance and the person is just responding to the commands how to do this and how to do that. … I find with strong students it is not an issue, but with weak students it can be a really difficult thing to figure it out.

Advisors also need to balance students' needs and abilities so that the advising relationship advances growth, as Autumn elaborated:

I think a good advising relationship is a caring relationship where you want the student to be successful but with a context of quality and standards, and so figuring out how to maintain a caring and ethical relationship within standards and quality can sometimes be complex.

Advisors are often driven to think about their students as individuals who have particular needs, assets and constraints. Their perspective is one of *equity*—the best outcomes for each student. Equity, which differs from equality, may mean that advisors offer different levels of support to students. Limited time and resources may also play a part in advising decisions, although this was not acknowledged in the advisor interviews.

Doctoral Students' Contexts and Perspectives

Student participants were at least two years into their programmes. Some had chosen specific advisors and programmes based on reputation or previous experiences; others had been assigned advisors. Prior to the interviews, students had not considered ethics in advising relationships. In fact, they invariably commented that, in their programmes, ethics discussions had been limited to ethical research practices and, occasionally, to

authorship. As students tried to define what would constitute ethical and unethical behaviour in the advising relationship, they reflected on their personal experiences and on incidents that they had observed with peers. Relational ethics were powerful, but unacknowledged, forces for determining how smoothly and quickly students progressed in their programmes.

Student participants and their peers compared notes about funding, research, authorship, conference presentations, coursework and advisors' responsiveness. They identified situations as "fair" (ethical) or "unfair" (unethical). Much of what they considered as unethical advising behaviour had never been brought to official attention because students feared retribution or did not know when and how to report issues.

Every interaction with advisors had the potential to affect their progress and, ultimately, their professional futures. Students knew that they could change advisors; however, changing advisors, or even adding co-advisors, could result in various forms of repercussions. Students told stories of peers losing funding, experiencing dissertation delays, having conference presentations withdrawn and being rejected by faculty who feared confrontations with the original advisor.

Students competed for attention, funding, recognition and honours that would ease their journeys and contribute to their future professional advancement. They subordinated equity for *fairness* or equal treatment. When one student received a more exciting research assignment or more generous funding than another student with the same advisor, the actions were often perceived as unfair. Steadman explained:

> When I notice favouritism, that bothers me. You're playing with a lot. You're playing with real money. You are playing with serious consequences if he gets to go to a particular conference and I don't. That's serious consequences later on in terms of what's on my CV and contacts.

Gatekeeping

Universities are cultural systems wrought with tradition and constrained by limited human and economic resources. These constraints have created gates along the path towards the doctoral degree. Students are not often aware of the gateways nor if the gateways are open or closed for them unless someone reveals it. Shaq expressed it this way:

You don't know your opportunities, and it almost is like they want you to come to them and ask for these opportunities, and then they'll award whoever comes first and whoever gives a legitimate reason why they should. I'm not going to know that unless you tell me that's what I need to do. The hidden text and all that scheming isn't how I work. But if you tell me that's how we work—we scheme here—I'll adjust to that.

The invisibility of the gates and the role of the advisor as gatekeeper are important components of ethics.

Programme acceptance. Admittance into the programme is an initial student gateway. Sometimes admission decisions have specific acceptance criteria in terms of Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) scores, Grade Point Average (GPA) and so on. But other variables may influence the final decision, as two faculty explained:

I know of student applicants that were scholars, but they want the work that none of us had the capacity to reasonably support. You know, so honestly, it is better for the student to not get admitted. Why should we bring you here and pay the money if we can't turn you into the scholar you want [to become]? (Anne)

[We have] … turned down qualified students because of a lack of [research] match or lack of availability. … There may have been a match, but those faculty were not in a position to take on additional students at that time. (Adelaide)

Graduate assistantships. Advisors control the gateway to assistantships, which provide individual mentoring in professional work. Experiences gained through assistantships vary widely depending on the assignments. Some students land multi-year positions on major grants, while others scramble each semester to nail down opportunities. Research assistants may learn all the facets of managing projects, including conducting literature reviews, collecting and analysing data, and publishing, or they may work on only one aspect. Other graduate assistants may be involved in teaching, planning conferences or managing a busy professor's task load. Adelaide said:

every faculty member has her own style and decides how much learning happens within the assistantship experience. Some are well-rounded, and others are not.

Projects, grants, presentations and publications. Advisors also manage gateway opportunities in terms of projects, grants, presentations and publications. The scarcity of these opportunities complicates the process for advisors, especially those with more than one doctoral student, and creates ethical dilemmas. Advisors may have been guided by the needs and skills of individual students (equity), but students perceived the doling out of opportunities differently, as some of the students articulated:

…it's just natural to have a favourite [doctoral student]. That comes up when it comes to appointments, classes you want to take and you can't get in: they get you in, conference, authorship, papers, that kind of thing. (Steadman)

We're all working on one project, and someone gets the plum sort of position and you go, "Whoa!" (Susan)

One of our cohort members has had almost every position you can have because her advisor has two big, big grants and gave her the opportunity to kind of see different parts. (Steadman)

Advisor's signature. At each significant stage in the doctoral programme (comprehensive exams, dissertation proposal, dissertation defence), students need the advisor's signature for the next step. The advisor has to ensure that the student has met the institution's standards and learning goals, which can block a student's progress, as was frequently mentioned by both students and advisors:

The committee said, "Sorry, this is not a passable dissertation". End of story. (Scott)

This student didn't meet the academic rigour or standards in order to pass their [comprehensive] exams, so I couldn't sign the form saying they passed. (Aaron)

Gateways are intended to ensure high quality, but each gateway has the potential for ethical challenges as well. What may seem sensible and natural to an administrator or an advisor may seem unfair to students who are not privy to how such decisions are made.

ADVISOR CARD

Being a doctoral student can feel like an uncharted journey along a path with multiple locked gates. At each gateway, students have the potential to receive unequal benefits. Some barely get past the gates; others not only pass through but also collect extended opportunities.

> The advisor can benefit or can harm. It's like an advisor card. My advisor is so and so who has held this position, who has done this, [who] is tenured, who's authored many things, and, you know, people open doors. (Shaq)

Successful or famous advisors have extensive networks within the field. Students with well-connected advisors receive more powerful *advisor cards* that can unlock opportunities. Other advisors have less powerful cards to offer, as was expressed by Shamira:

> You have access to a lot of people through your advisor, but if he or she does not have the right network …then you do not have access to that network.

Advisors may not be aware of the advisor card and its implications for ethical decision-making.

Within institution. The advisor knows and understands the landscape of academia, and can help the student to navigate within the university. Advisors attempt to protect students; however, students might perceive this as limiting their autonomy. Students explained:

> My advisor in her position is: "I won't accept that person on my committee. I refuse to work with that person". … Extreme control in terms of who is on my committee. … I didn't understand that going into it. (Sarah)

> [My advisor] has the ultimate say on what you get to do, how much access you have to his other networks, to other networks within the institution, and would kind of be the first and last stop into the program. … [e] can give you access to everything or hold back that. (Shamira)

When advisors have multiple students, providing equal access to all students may become a dilemma. When asked about the ethical and unethical components of the advisor relationship, one of the students mentioned:

One advisor, many advisees. They might have one they favour over others. (Steadman)

You get to know each other if you have the same advisor, and then I think the funding here is still competitive. (Steadman)

Outside institution. Students often submit to their advisor's power because they understand that the advisor's scope of influence can extend beyond the degree programme into jobs, research connections and grants. They believe that submission will pay off, as Shamira predicted:

I'm going to need the professor's network when I'm out looking for a job, so I'm not going to fight on this because I want to maintain, preserve my relationships and my networks.

Students learn that their advisors have the power to grant or withhold benefits. Advisors, on the other hand, may not be conscious that advisor cards even exist, so they do not consider whether their decisions to extend opportunities to some students and not to others are ethical.

Discussion of Findings

One of the most striking revelations from the research was how little attention ethics in advising relationships receive. Although participants initially asserted that there were no ethical issues in advising relationships, they eventually acknowledged that relational ethics were difficult to define, rarely discussed and inadequately addressed.

What passes as ethical is highly dependent on the perspective of the decision-maker. Perspectives differed based on the roles that participants played in doctoral programmes. Administrators expressed a right/wrong perspective governed by policies and procedures. They intervened in ethical disagreements between advisors and students when individuals interpreted policies differently.

Advisors, as teachers, seemed to lean towards ethics based on equity or the best outcomes for students. However, advisors often lack the time and resources truly to meet each individual's needs. Instead, their decisions may be guided by which advisees are present, available or easy to manage. Given the scarcity of resources, practicality may seem a reasonable compromise for many advisors.

Students consistently defined ethics as fair or equal treatment. As the least powerful members of the community, students competed for resources that would define their future professional lives. Students suggested that equal treatment would achieve ethical balance.

Comparisons of the advising relationships to family dynamics highlighted how emotionally fraught advising relationships can become. The language also emphasised the power differential between advisors as parents and students as children.

Since individuals typically view decisions only through their own ethical perspectives, administrators, faculty advisors and doctoral students are unlikely to agree on a common advising ethics definition. For instance, gatekeeping is ethical from an advisor's perspective, but, in many instances, students perceive it as bestowing or withholding the advisor card, which can be perceived as unfair and unethical.

Gatekeeping can be viewed as an academic's responsibility for maintaining high-quality programmes, but it can also marginalise some students while benefiting others. Along the doctoral journey, students encounter gates where their advisors have the power to impede or promote forward progress.

Students talked about advisors' keys as *advisor cards*. Each student gains prestige and privileges from contact with an advisor. Advisor cards open gates to career-building opportunities such as presentations, publications and networks in the academic field. However, not all cards are equal, and advisors with multiple advisees may distribute opportunities unequally because of the scarcity of resources and time. The inequality of opportunities feels unethical, particularly to students who receive less powerful advisor cards.

Expectations and ethical practices of doctoral supervision are transmitted through daily practice, conversations and institutional regulations (Halse, 2011; Löfström & Pyhältö, 2015), and it appears that most ethical issues stem from the poor supervisory practices of advisors (Halse, 2011). However, these ethical problems often go uncorrected. Advisors who were repeat offenders continued to be assigned advisees despite their behaviour, and students rarely reported problems until after they had graduated.

Conclusion

Based upon the findings of this research, we recommend that conversations about ethics become a proactive norm in doctoral programmes. These conversations would include participation by stakeholders at every level of the system, including administrators, faculty and students. The goal of these conversations would be to enhance transparency, which is the process by which we make information available, accessible and comprehensible for all stakeholders. In ethical grey areas undefined by policy, intentional perspective-taking may be a step towards ethical transparency.

For administrators, we recommend that policies be collaboratively developed and implemented to provide students with safe spaces for discussing unethical treatment. We also recommend developing policies and providing training for advisors regarding best practices for ethical mentoring. Addressing ethics within the doctoral advising relationship, Löfström and Pyhältö (2015) proposed more extensive training for doctoral advisors, and "pedagogical training in general and supervision training more specifically to provide knowledge and skills that are useful in the supervision process of doctoral students" (p. 11).

For faculty advisors, we recommend initiating ethical perspective sharing and talking as a deliberate routine to enhance transparency in the advising process. This may require extra time where advisors intentionally reflect on why and how they are making their advising decisions. It may be helpful for advisors to pull students together for a needs assessment to help students to make their expectations transparent.

The integrity of the institution and the honour of a doctorate require the advisor and all those involved to approach these opportunities in ethical ways. The processes and procedures in awarding scarce resources vary from institution to institution, programme to programme, advisor to advisor and committee to committee. Despite university appeal processes, students feel vulnerable because they have insufficient power and/or knowledge to challenge the system. Advisors and the institutional policies that guide their decisions need to be considered carefully through the lens of gatekeeping because of the blind spots. It is the responsibility of those who have power to provide full disclosure to those with less power. Scarcity of resources requires university policymakers and faculty advisors to consider carefully the ethics involved within decision-making processes. One way to make these decisions more ethical is to have transparent policies and relationships.

REFERENCES

Appel, M. L., & Dahlgren, L. G. (2003). Swedish doctoral students' experiences on their journey towards a PhD: Obstacles and opportunities inside and outside the academic building. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 47*(1), 89–110. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313830308608

Barnes, B. J., & Austin, A. E. (2009). The role of doctoral advisors: A look at advising from the advisor's perspective. *Innovative Higher Education, 33*(5), 297–315. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-008-9084-x

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2014). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Gilbar, O., Winstok, Z., Weinberg, M., & Bershtling, O. (2013). Whose doctorate is it anyway? Guidelines for an agreement between adviser and doctoral student regarding the advisement process and intellectual property rights. *Journal of Academic Ethics, 11*(1), 73–80. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10805-012-9177-0

Golde, C. M. (2005). The role of the department and discipline in doctoral student attrition: Lessons from four departments. *The Journal of Higher Education, 76*(6), 669–700. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2005.11772304

Gray, P., & Jordan, S. (2012). Supervisors and academic integrity: Supervisors as exemplars and mentors. *Journal of Academic Ethics, 10*(4), 299–311. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10805-012-9155-6

Halse, C. (2011). 'Becoming a supervisor': The impact of doctoral supervision on supervisors' learning. *Studies in Higher Education, 36*(5), 557–570. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.594593

Harding-DeKam, J., Hamilton, B., & Loyd, S. (2012). The hidden curriculum of doctoral advising. *NACDA: The Journal of the National Academic Advising Association, 32*(2), 5–15. https://doi.org/10.12930/0271-9517-32.2.5

Knox, S., Schlosser, L. Z., Pruitt, N. T., & Hill, C. E. (2006). A qualitative examination of graduate advising relationships: The advisor perspective. *The Counseling Psychologist, 34*(4), 489–518. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000006290249

Löfström, E., & Pyhältö, K. (2015). 'I don't even have time to be their friend!' Ethical dilemmas in Ph.D. supervision in the hard sciences. *International Journal of Science Education, 37*(16), 2721–2739. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500693.2015.1104424

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass.

Mutula, S., & Majinge, R. M. (2015). *Ethical aspects of doctoral-research advising in the emerging African information society*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Peluso, D. L., Carleton, R. N., Richter, A. A., & Asmundson, G. J. G. (2011). The graduate advising relationship in Canadian psychology programmes. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne, 52*(1), 29–40. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022047

Puddephatt, A., Shaffir, W., & Kleinknecht, S. (2009). Introduction. In A. Puddephatt, W. Shaffir, & S. Kleinknecht (Eds.), *Ethnographies revisited: Constructing theory in the field* (pp. 1–34). Routledge.

Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications Ltd.

Schlosser, L. Z., Lyons, H. Z., Regine, M., Talleyrand, R. M., et al. (2011a). A multiculturally infused model of graduate advising relationships. *Journal of Career Development, 38*(1), 44–61. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845309359286

Schlosser, L. Z., Lyons, H. Z., Talleyrand, R. M., Kim, B. S. K., & Johnson, W. B. (2011b). Advisor–advisee relationships in graduate training programs. *Journal of Career Development, 38*(1), 3–18. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845309358887

Proven Best Practices in Guiding Non-traditional Dissertation Students to Degree Conferral in the United States

Gina Peyton, David Brian Ross, Vanaja Nethi, Melissa Tara Sasso, and Lucas A. DeWitt

Introduction

Before exploring this important topic, the authors would like to give a background of the students and College within the University, in order to explain the authors' perspectives when guiding and advising students. These online, non-traditional, graduate students are defined as adults pursuing a higher degree while working full-time and working in their specialised fields to further their professional endeavours. Based on the

G. Peyton (✉) • D. B. Ross • V. Nethi • M. T. Sasso
Nova Southeastern University, Davie, FL, USA
e-mail: peyton@nova.edu; daviross@nova.edu; nethi@nova.edu; msass001@fiu.edu

L. A. DeWitt
Buena Vista University, Storm Lake, IA, USA
e-mail: dewitt2@bvu.edu

non-traditional students' needs, universities incorporate synchronous and asynchronous learning (Cross, 2014). Women are the majority, at every degree level at 70% of the total enrolment from 2015 to 2019; 29% are graduates and professionals over the age of 35 (Nova Southeastern University, 2020, p. 117). In 2014, Margerum researched how non-traditional graduate students were late completers, as well as mentioning that 50% of these students were over 30 years of age. The Colleges' admissions policy requires a 3.0 GPA from an accredited institution and two letters of recommendations. For the majority, the students complete their doctoral degree completely online using a Canvas platform or learning management system. The design of the Doctorate of Education (EdD) is to be completed in three years, and the students begin working on their dissertation after one and a half years while working on coursework. Because these non-traditional students are online, dissertation chairs' interactions with these students are mostly limited to email, video chat, text, telephone or applications such as WhatsApp and WeChat. Hopefully, this provides a helpful description of the students and where the dissertation chair needs to begin when advising, mentoring and building relationships.

Research has indicated that the rates of completion of doctoral degrees have increased over the years. This information varies based on the field of study; however, if university doctoral programmes do not provide enough support and build productive and encouraging relationships between the student and the dissertation chair, high attrition rates will develop as students will not feel a connection with the academic community (Berry, 2017; Burrington et al., 2020). The reduction in completion rates is comparable from the undergraduate level to the doctoral level. Bagaka et al. (2015) reviewed other studies from past decades, indicating that 50% of doctoral students did not complete their programmes. Burrington et al. (2020) continued to illustrate that more traditional Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and EdD programmes had completion rates of only 40% to 60%. In addition, non-traditional doctoral students face many challenges and are at high risk of not completing their programmes (Burrington et al., 2020; Cross, 2014). When students receive support and mentoring from colleagues and faculty, students have an increased chance to complete the doctoral programme (Bagaka et al., 2015). Ferrer de Valero (2001) noted that those students who were enrolled in graduate programmes between 1983 and 1993 showed an increase of time spent (i.e., 6.6 years to 7.1 years) attempting to complete the programme. Ferrer de Valero opined

that this increase of time to complete a doctoral programme could continue, which also has an influence regarding graduates' postponement of entering the trained workforce.

Lovitts (2001) studied the persistent rate of attrition regarding students who departed their doctoral programmes from 1982 to 1984. Lovitts revealed that a persistent 50% of students who left their programme did so based on emotional distress, absence of community and lack of information. Other factors of attrition were poor relationships with dissertation chairs and colleagues, lack of support, working in isolation, disappointment regarding the learning experiences, loss of interest, self-neglect and exhaustion, lack of training for graduate students, inappropriate policies for admission and funding (Lovitts, 2001; Robinson & Tagher, 2017; Virtanen & Taina, 2016), and disengagement, anxiety and depression (Berry, 2017). Miller (2013) mentioned that an 88% graduation rate in 2009 was higher than the national average graduation rate in the United States. Johnson (2015) revealed that students who were in the doctoral programme for ten years resulted in a 56.6% completion rate. Doctoral students depart their doctoral programmes because of factors related to problematic relationships with their advisors, ineffective advising, teaching quality, programme structure and lack of orientation, financial support, students' demographic backgrounds and field of study (Casey et al., 2018; Ferrer de Valero, 2001; Miller, 2013).

Besides institutional factors, students depart their programmes owing to family responsibilities and personal problems, lifestyle preferences, social isolation, distress and negative peer relations (Casey et al., 2018; Virtanen & Taina, 2016). One important factor is the need for relevant goals and preparation for the students' careers. Based on research and these authors' expert experiences, the earlier that the doctoral student obtains a dissertation committee, the greater the chances of persistence and completion. When a dissertation chair communicates the dissertation process early in the student's programme and encourages the student to ask questions and to be proactive, the less chances that the students will fall behind and possibly depart the programme (Young et al., 2019). There is a multitude of doctoral programmes throughout higher education with different structures and philosophies. A suggested process that would benefit the student and the institution of higher education is to develop a student-to-dissertation chair relationship early in the programme, which will lead to more time to collaborate and to develop a mutual agreement on the direction of the topic and the methodology.

This will also increase time to prepare a structured action plan regarding other factors such as institutional review boards, completion of the Belmont Report that is observed for all research involving human participants (i.e., respect for persons, beneficence and justice) (Grady, 2015; United States Department of Health & Human Services, 1979, 2021) and obtaining a research setting, as many organisations have different protocols for site approvals.

INTERDEPENDENCE AND SOCIAL INTERDEPENDENCE THEORIES

In 1959, two social and behavioural theorists, John Thibaut and Harold Kelley, developed the *Interdependence Theory*, which could identify the personality regarding situation structure, and that group structure alters outcomes (Jongman, 2017). "Situation structure is the interpersonal reality within which cognition, affect, and motivation transpire, and for which such processes are functionally adapted" (Rusbult & Lange, 2008, p. 2050). This is important as it delves into how meaningfully two people interact, based on needs, thoughts and motives while influencing the other person's outcomes (Rusbult & Lange, 2008). The relationship between dissertation students and their committee members is vital for success that ultimately has a positive impact on outcomes (Burrington et al., 2020; Casey et al., 2018), and aligns well with this theory as the relationship would need to have broader considerations and the concern for the situations that they would confront, such as the dissertation topic and methodology. Rusbult and Lange (2008) explained that the needs, thoughts and motives within this relationship should lead to a satisfying conclusion of concrete outcomes (e.g., a satisfying instant experience of feedback) and symbolic outcomes (e.g., the perception that the dissertation committee is responsive to the student's needs).

Prior to the development of the interdependence theory, in 1949 Morton Deutsch developed the *Social Interdependence Theory*, which was designed to probe into small groups' function based on cooperation (positive interdependence) and competition (negative interdependence) (Jongman, 2017). Jongman (2017) confirmed that Deutsch began his writing during the era of Darwinism, and felt that his theory was an antithesis to the theory of Social Darwinism, as individuals need to collaborate as part of a group and to be able to have confidence in others while

working on a project. The negative interdependence, which is more of a one-person structure, should not be applied in the case of relations for a dissertation team, as this will lead to negative interactions with low success and health levels. On the other hand, positive interdependence would be justified for a successful dissertation team relationship, as individuals could equally share and achieve their goals and desired outcomes, such as completion of the dissertation (Jongman, 2017; Young et al., 2019). Although an advisor–student relationship could be noteworthy, Young et al. (2019) explained that communicating expectations, goals and deadlines, along with trust, support from the advisor should be enacted to promote interdependence, while the student should be proactive in the process to maintain a collaborative perspective.

Professional Relationship Formation and Development

Since ProQuest is professedly the largest database consisting of over five million dissertations and masters' theses, a researcher could obtain 2.7 million of these documents in full text. In addition, institutions of higher education could have a database containing students' documents that were never submitted to ProQuest or other professional databases such as NSUWorks at Nova Southeastern University in the United States. With this stated, there had to have been a myriad of relationships between the millions of students and their committee chairs and members, not to mention the main strategic arrangements to complete these studies. Some arrangements could be based upon communication services such as feedback and questioning, developing a collaborative culture, mentoring, building trust, and making plans and timelines (Burrington et al., 2020; Young et al., 2019). Young et al. (2019) illustrated positive influencers of student success in a doctoral programme as including mutual trust, clear communication, relationships with proactive behaviours, structured institutional trainings and clear expectations from advisors. The pressures from the negative sphere were listed as incompatible personalities and an absence of advising, support and mentoring (Young et al., 2019). Furthermore, the lack of setting timelines/scheduling, time management and public speaking for research and writing are crucial matters (Carter-Veale et al., 2016; Young et al., 2019).

Young et al. (2019) investigated a study by Mansson and Myers regarding the characteristics of what it takes to have a successful relationship. The data findings from three valid scales (i.e., *Mentoring and Communication Support*, *Academic Mentoring Behaviour* and *Advisee Relational Maintenance*) determined that showing appreciation, being courteous, protecting the dissertation chair's reputation and discussing goals were important elements of building and sustaining a relationship. Relatedly, a study by Mazerolle et al. (2015) identified that successful relationships include trust, communication and the need to have encouraging independence, collaboration, reciprocal relationships and chances for professional development. This qualitative study investigated how advisors mentored their students (Young et al., 2019). Burrington et al. (2020) mentioned a meta-synthesis of 118 studies by Bair and Haworth that established that the student–dissertation chair relationship is vital for completion rates to increase.

The ability of students to focus and work strictly on completing their dissertation has proven to be successful based on three models: the mentor model; the cohort model; and the course-focused model. The *mentor model* is when dissertation chairs provide encouragement, feedback via draft submissions, trust building, professional development, increasing interpersonal skills, help with publishing and guidance (Burrington et al., 2020; Keel & Bearden, 2020). The *cohort model* is an interactive, social support format consisting of the entire team (i.e., student, faculty, dissertation chair, dissertation committee), as this promotes an increased level of accomplishments and positive relationships compared to students working without cooperation (Holmes et al., 2010; Keel & Bearden, 2020). Additionally, with the cohort model, this process utilises peer-to-peer interaction and peer review/feedback in writing (Defazio et al., 2010). The *course-focused model* is designed to give students coursework strictly related to their dissertation, where faculty are chosen specifically based on relevant experience and expertise with dissertations, research, methodology and curricula focused in these areas. Miller (2013) mentioned that students in programmes with academic and student support will have increased retention rates. Since not all students enter a programme with research and writing experience, these programmes/models are beneficial, as they have many important components: library instruction; computer services; and research and writing instruction (Miller, 2013).

Communication

Written or spoken communication is the exchanging of information from sender to receiver. A person can be an effective communicator; however, if the receiver does not understand the information, there will be a limitation in the communication process. Effective and efficient communication is imperative to the dissertation chair–student relationship (Margerum, 2014) in order to include generational changes (Fedock, 2017). The dissertation chair needs to convey to the student what is expected in the dissertation process (Fedock, 2017), and not to assume that the student already knows. A conversation should take place at the beginning of the process to see if the dissertation chair–student relationship is compatible. "Although on the surface the process of pairing doctoral students with faculty may seem both simple and somewhat harmless, it can be a very difficult and challenging experience for a doctoral student" (Hineman & Semich, 2017, para. 4). Spoken communication can be achieved in person, over the telephone or through videoconferencing; email correspondence is the most practised form of written communication. Whichever method is utilised, it must be agreed upon on both sides. This is a unique relationship, and both sides must feel comfortable with each other. Effective communication is an important part of all relationships and is an essential part of any strong partnership, especially cross-cultural and generational, while receiving feedback (Fedock, 2017).

Baumann (2017) stated that "effective leaders must be effective communicators, not just talkers" (p. 460). Tardanico (2016, as cited in Baumann, 2017) stated that there are "five habits of highly effective communicators which include (a) mind the say-do gap, (b) make the complex simple, (c) find your own voice, (d) be visible, and (e) listen with your eyes as well as your ears" (p. 460). These behaviours focus on how a person says something rather than what is stated. This practice ought to take place between a dissertation chair and a student. In this example, the chair is the leader and should focus on how the communication is relayed. When providing feedback, a chair should be honest and sincere. Common practice for the College that has been well-received by students is when the feedback provided by the chair is positive, specific with information, immediate or timely, and tough but not mean (Baumann, 2017: Fedock, 2017). When feedback is provided clearly, respectfully and positively, the reception is typically heard and addressed as quickly as possible.

Proactive communication can help dissertation chairs to know when students are experiencing difficulties (Margerum, 2014), and the faculty–student relationship is extremely important at the College. A *Compact between Faculty and Student* was created to support this relationship; it is a:

> …declaration of a continuous commitment to supporting a vibrant community for all educators and students…and the purpose of this *Compact* is to provide behavioral guidelines that will foster, clarify, and energize Fischler's commitment to its educational mission. (Nova Southeastern University, 2021, p. 8)

Ultimately, the faculty and student pledge to do their own respective part, with the utmost effort, to ensure a successful outcome. The implementation of this *Compact* is a communication process that "involves showing simple respect and seeking ways to secure each other's trust" (Cairney & Kwiatkowski, 2017, p. 2). Effective communication and commitment require preparation, diplomacy and good judgement as much as good support.

THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION AND THE ROLE OF THE DISSERTATION CHAIR

The dissertation is a core component of the doctoral degree as institutions that offer the online doctoral programme strive to find effective ways for their students to complete successfully the online dissertation, and thus avoid the dreaded label of All but Dissertation (ABD). The role of the dissertation chair regarding the doctoral student's ability to complete the dissertation successfully is unambiguously recognised in the literature (Brabazon, 2016; Hineman & Semich, 2017; Holley & Caldwell, 2012; Muirhead & Blum, 2006; Zhao et al., 2007). Roberts and Bandlow (2018) aptly stated, "The whole point of doctoral study is to bring a transformation from dependent student to independent scholar" (p. 62), and the dissertation chair is integral to this process. Roberts et al. (2019), in a recent study in the United States, found that effective dissertation chairs in top-ranked educational doctoral programmes (i.e., EdD, PhD) see their role as multifaceted: "An effective doctoral student mentor wears many hats and asks many questions" (p. 146). Roberts et al. classified these roles into three kinds of support to students: managerial support; technical

support; and moral support. Below are examples of best practices that are implemented at the College to guide, support and mentor dissertation students to degree conferral.

Managerial Support in the Doctoral Dissertation Process

Non-traditional doctoral students tend to be older adults, more than 40 years old, and hence are not digital natives. However, over time, these students manage their coursework successfully once they become familiar with the online environment. Black (2017) referred to the doctoral advisor in an online programme as an e-mentor and to the process as e-mentoring. Although the dissertation chair and students at the authors' College are matched through a formal process, Black described e-mentoring as "…intrinsically a deeply human process [that] involves the nurturing of a novice or less-experienced person (protégé) by a seasoned and experienced person…" (p. 1). In an earlier work, *The Dissertation Marathon,* Black (2012) drew a parallel between the doctoral dissertation and running a marathon. In preparing the student for the journey ahead, one of the roles of the dissertation chair is to provide managerial support to the novice. The chair clearly explains the dissertation process that requires pacing and sustained commitment from the student over an extended period of time. The chair works *with the student* to lay out a roadmap leading to graduation, and adds timelines to each milestone to break down the long marathon into doable, shorter segments. In addition, the chair keeps abreast of all developments related to the resources and services available at the university and online to meet the changing needs of students at different stages of their dissertations.

Timelines

Creating a chronological schedule to assist students in completing their dissertation is one of the first tasks that a dissertation chair should complete together with the student. Most important is creating a reasonable and feasible timeline. As previously indicated, non-traditional dissertation students have complicated work and personal schedules. However, according to Fedock (2017), "disengaged students who struggle with self-efficacy issues related to generational differences may unsuccessfully meet dissertation completion timelines" (p. 1). What the student believes that he and/or she can do and what he and/or she can accomplish are two

different factors. Creating a visual goal for students may be needed to influence their decision-making consciously when creating a feasible schedule to complete the dissertation (Cairney & Kwiatkowski, 2017). Students need to set long-term and short-term goals for the dissertation process. The long-term goal should first be set, as the question "*When do you want to have your dissertation completed?*" needs to be addressed. Then, through the process of working from the end date backwards, a schedule can be created to set the short-term goals by dividing up the sections of the dissertation. Visually seeing the sections and the due dates at various times render the task achievable and less daunting. The student must be accepting of this formal structure in order to complete in a suitable and manageable timeframe.

Dissertation benchmarks. Dissertation chairs in the programme adopt these and other similar strategies to perform a strong managerial support role. They equip students early in the doctoral journey with a clear roadmap for completion and set timelines. The 12-credit doctoral dissertation breaks down into four dissertation benchmarks of three credits each. These benchmarks serve as milestones on the dissertation roadmap. Then, working with the individual student, the chair *personalises the dissertation roadmap* to fit the student's schedule, strengths and weaknesses, and the specific support services and resources needed by the student.

Research courses. In the *embedded-dissertation* doctoral programme, students begin work on their dissertation while still completing their doctoral coursework (i.e., concentration, research). The research courses in the doctoral programme are designed to support students at each dissertation benchmark. If students are strategically enrolled in these research courses, it will allow the students to complete sections on the subject of their methodology and findings. In the managerial support role, the dissertation chair ensures that the research courses are built into the roadmap with timelines for tangible products from these courses to be submitted to the chair as draft sections or draft chapters of the dissertation. Students then continue the work of revising them with feedback from the dissertation committee. Sverdlik et al. (2018) stated that "students who engaged in planning and revision during the writing process felt more confidence and less anxiety" (p. 378). The feedback and revisions process should be a positive experience as the dissertation chair is guiding the students toward completion.

Technical Support: Enabling the Trajectory from Dependent Student to Independent Scholar

Muirhead et al. (2005) provided helpful tips to dissertation chairs to share with their new dissertation students. Students are encouraged to keep in regular contact with the chair, and to submit sections of work as these are completed. The chair should make it easy for the student to contact her or him by providing alternative channels of communication besides email. Sverdlik et al. (2018) opined that another method to collaborate was through face-to-face communications, as it is more beneficial to share ideas and strategies, as well as barriers. It is important to stress to students to learn to manage their time and resources wisely, to keep a routine of working on the dissertation and to have accountability built in. Students also need to understand that the process of doing re-writes in the dissertation-writing process *is the norm*, and to be expected. Instead of striving for perfection and then being frustrated or disheartened with the critique given, students should be mentally prepared to accept feedback as something positive and leading them closer to their goal of graduation (Baumann, 2017: Fedock, 2017).

When students are in the early stages of their dissertation, they look up to their chair as the "expert" and expect the chair to tell them what to do (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2007). To help to build competence, and to enable the student to transition to an independent scholar, the dissertation chair should gently guide the student to resources and practices that will help to develop such independence. These vary according to the needs of individual students, but include, for example, acquiring more advanced online library search skills, improving academic writing skills, becoming better acquainted with the referencing system, brushing up on statistics or learning a qualitative data analysis software. Students' needs and how they perceive themselves in relation to their work change as they progress in the dissertation, but timely and targeted technical support from their dissertation chair ensures that students do not stagnate in this process and avoid being bogged down with a sense of helplessness.

Challenges related to writing are the biggest hurdle for some students working on their dissertations. Aitchison et al. (2012) found that students become frustrated when the advisor's feedback is perceived as unhelpful, such as feedback that merely identified what was wrong in terms of grammar, sentence structure or presentation but that did not guide the student on how to correct it. However, from the advisors' perspective, they see

themselves as content or methodological experts and not as experts in teaching literacy practices. In times like these, the role of the advisor in providing technical support should come to the fore to suggest hiring a dissertation editor, utilise the writing resources provided at the university or seek out other students with similar concerns who have successfully completed the dissertation.

Finally, the dissertation chair should encourage students to have a strong dissertation student support system (Muirhead et al., 2005). Working on a doctoral dissertation is a lonely endeavour and, for students in an online doctoral programme, the sense of isolation is even more pronounced (Casey et al., 2018; Jairam & Kahl Jr., 2012; Virtanen & Taina, 2016). Thus, having a supportive network of individuals, comprising some who are currently working on their dissertations, others who have recently graduated and family members, is important for student success on this long dissertation journey.

The Doctoral Dissertation and the Experiences of the Dissertation Student

Time Management

"Better three hours too soon, than one minute too late"—William Shakespeare.

One of the many important aspects of students' successful completion of their dissertation is managing their time wisely. That stated, time management is a critical skill for all doctoral students to attain in order to complete their dissertation successfully. According to Ghiasvand et al. (2017) and Adams and Blair (2019), to be successful in life, one must be effective when managing one's time. In the late 1950s, the concept of behaviour of time management was coined, and is defined as utilising the time available in the best or most favourable way, which is to include characteristics of setting goals, communicating, assigning, prioritising events and planning (Ghiasvand et al., 2017). Similarly, Alani et al. (2020) defined time management as "the behaviour which aims at effectively using the time to complete goal-oriented activities" (p. 201). Students who display strong time management skills often illustrate their ability to engage in many areas, and do so tactfully and successfully. That stated, as a former dissertation student myself, I did have the ability to manage my

time, where not only was I completing my dissertation, but I was also working on a publication with my dissertation chair. Research has illustrated that the ability to apply one's time management skills is linked with academic achievement, a decrease in stress, boosted creativity and being self-efficient, as well as students having an overall feeling of satisfaction (Adams & Blair, 2019; Ghiasvand et al., 2017). Knowing that I could work on my dissertation and finding room to work on a publication was a gratifying feeling, and gave me more reason to continue pushing forward, and giving me the confidence that I needed to complete this chapter in my life.

According to Cyril (2015), attaining time management skills provides students with the opportunity to plan and prioritise their future assignments. It was further illustrated that having such time management skills is a critical component of keeping students organised and of preventing procrastination, which in turn allows a student to be academically successful (Alani et al., 2020; Cyril, 2015; Ghiasvand et al., 2017). Ghiasvand et al. (2017) added that this academic success and this attempt for success are academic motivation. Moreover, it has been indicated that academic motivation, in turn, helps students to obtain skills, learn and attain academic achievement (Ghiasvand et al., 2017; Mutisya et al., 2019).

Support System

Much like the importance of time management, having a solid support system is also equally crucial for students to complete the dissertation process. Approximately 50% of doctoral students do not complete their degrees, and approximately 40,000 students drop out yearly (Hill & Conceição, 2019; Jairam & Kahl Jr., 2012; van Rooij et al., 2019). It was further indicated that the two most significant factors in doctoral student attrition are stress and social isolation (Jairam & Kahl Jr., 2012). Berry (2017) concluded that doctoral students also suffer from disengagement, depression and anxiety. There are various forms of support systems that dissertation students may acquire throughout this journey, such as support from their family, academic cohort, faculty members and their dissertation chair. Based on my personal experience, my dissertation chair and my family were paramount to my success.

Young et al. (2019) explicated that the role of mentorship is crucial in order to develop doctoral students into professionals. Estrada et al. (2019) revealed that the best form of social support is via mentorship. Mentorship

can be defined as the knowledge of an experienced professional who offers professional development support to an apprentice (Estrada et al., 2019; Hill & Conceição, 2019). According to research conducted by Eby et al. (2013), mentors offer three forms of support: (a) psychosocial support; (b) instrumental support; and (c) networking support. It was further revealed that apprentices illustrate a positive result when mentors offer psychosocial and instrumental support. An example of instrumental support was when my dissertation chair shared other scholarly resources, and, more importantly, access to the survey that he had created and that I utilised to conduct my mixed methods research for my dissertation. In terms of psychosocial support, my dissertation chair offered the same philosophy that he had learned from his dissertation chair: a continuation of mentorship via publishing and cultivating my career. Hill and Conceição (2019) explicated that research mentorship functions as an imperative aspect of scholarly engagement and success for doctoral students. Hill and Conceição additionally mentioned that doctoral mentors offer technical support in terms of research and writing and managerial support to set goals.

Hill and Conceição (2019) indicated that relationships with faculty could have lifelong effects on a student's career. I was fortunate, as my dissertation chair continued to mentor me past my doctoral degree by publishing an abundance of international book chapters with me, in addition to presenting at conferences together. This, in turn, allowed me to network with his colleagues, and to continue to publish with others, and offered me an additional opportunity to broaden my networking to attain additional clients for my editing company. Furthermore, my dissertation chair mentored me to make the right choices for my career path once my doctoral journey was over. Young et al. (2019) revealed that mentors are critical in a doctoral educational life, and aid students within their chosen career path. This comprises exposing students to teach, conduct research and broaden their knowledge of how to handle office politics.

Steps to Success in Writing a Dissertation

Students must know the reasons and purpose why they began the doctoral process, and, if they do not have the right motivation, their chance of success diminishes. Autonomy over one's study, motivation to attend graduate school and mentorship develop a positive affiliation to continuing one's education toward completion (Bagaka et al., 2015; Hill & Conceição, 2019). While there are many variables in creating a successful dissertation,

nothing is more important than a student's determination to finish (Young et al., 2019). Students must have the *want to* attitude and the desire to complete the task before them. If a student has this dedication and focus, the rest of the process will usually take care of itself. Bagaka et al. (2015) mentioned that completion rates are influenced by the university's programme practices and features, and by successful programmes for mentorship and student engagement. Other areas that could create conflict in dissertation completion include time management, conducting the research and going through the extensive writing process of editing and submission (Keel & Bearden, 2020). These challenges are all within the control of the student, and again can usually be overcome based on the *grit* of the writer. For students to succeed with well-defined intentions in a rigorous environment, time management skills are essential (Aeon et al., 2021).

There are some important choices that students can make when beginning the dissertation process. Perhaps the most important one is the choice of their dissertation chair and committee members. Bagaka et al. (2015) mentioned that obtaining high satisfaction and relationship rates between students and faculty was paramount for a positive collaboration. A student can be motivated to write, but without the right dissertation chair the process can become very challenging. As a student, one can research the track record of major professors' publications as well as their success rate in helping other students to meet their publication goals. Having a dissertation chair who is committed to a student's success is truly key (Jongman, 2017; Young et al., 2019). Dissertation chairs must want their students to be successful, and as a result they will offer insight, stay connected and involved, and respond to deadlines in a timely fashion. It is essential that students have open and honest communication so that deadlines can be met, feedback can be provided and the process can move forward (Young et al., 2019). Students will spend a considerable amount of time with their dissertation chairs and will learn from their expertise and insight. It is important to meet the dissertation chair, have timely check-ins and work together.

Having a career and working on a dissertation simultaneously are a time management challenge. Although Adams and Blair (2019) mentioned the connection between time management and performance, Aeon et al. (2021) further stated that, separately from job performance and one's well-being, academic achievement associates with time management skills. Aeon et al. explained that three components should be analysed when

prioritising one's schedule: structuring, protecting and adapting time. The *protecting time* is associated with sacrifices of what interferes with one's time, as research and writing take centre stage for this period of life (Miller, 2013). The *structuring time* is related to routines and activities that integrate and are well-structured. Most students seem to have different ways of working to meet deadlines, which need to be structured and to have purposive direction (Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017); consistency of routines is key. Weekends and days off provide the writer with much-needed extensive blocks of writing time, but equally important is setting aside an hour or two a day to work just on the dissertation. By getting oneself into this habit, a student is not *restarting* and refocusing but is always immersed in the process. This continual approach allows a student to gain traction in writing and to work at a stable rate, which for many writers facilitates continual progress and not delaying the necessary work. This important process of re-appraising changing conditions to evaluate daily and weekly schedules is associated with the *adapting time* component (Aeon et al., 2021).

The "two e" Syndrome: Excuses and Entitlement

There are many methods that faculty and dissertation chairs could implement when advising doctoral students to increase their achievement and completion of a project, dissertation and programme. However, no matter the methods, time, commitment and dedication that faculty and dissertation chairs extend to students to help them to complete their degrees, students must be accountable for their actions and for making progress. The authors of this chapter mentioned many problematic relationships and personal barriers that students may face, but ultimately students should manage their time and complete their work with fewer excuses and a non-entitled attitude. Dr. Vera Triplett, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the Noble Minds Institute for Whole Child Learning in the State of Louisiana, United States, offered information regarding a no-excuse movement from two perspectives: the teacher and the student (Triplett, 2016). This movement holds teachers accountable for providing an exceptional education to all students, while students have to be responsible for meeting the expectations of learning, regardless of personal barriers. Golann (2015) delved into this no-excuse model to prepare students with increased skills and behavioural expectations for college. This philosophy helps school personnel to safeguard students from academic

failure while refusing to use race, poverty and previous learning experiences as excuses (Golann, 2015).

In the K-20 system, it was indicated that teachers and professors must demonstrate a profound emphasis on both the learning and the teaching process, and not just on attaining a particular score (Sasso & Ross, 2020). These two processes combined are important to increase learning outcomes and student performance and are emphasised via contextualised and experiential learning and to prepare students for real-world needs (Bondie et al., 2019; Paolini, 2015; Ramaswamy, 2018). That stated, educators need to construct an atmosphere where structure and organisation offer a chance for students to learn and apply their knowledge with corrective feedback, and to engage in academic tasks at challenging levels, as well as providing sessions throughout the semesters to give students the opportunity to ask questions (Bondie et al., 2019; Paolini, 2015). An important aspect regarding corrective feedback involves draft submissions. Researchers had conducted studies regarding academic learning and feedback (e.g., audio, written) to increase a student's ability to research and write at an academic level (Cavanaugh & Song, 2014; Defazio et al., 2010). Cavanaugh and Song (2014) analysed the possible differences when faculty responded with either audio (i.e., MP3 file) or written feedback about submitted drafts. The results varied based on factors such as online learning and face-to-face courses; however, if faculty use both audio and written feedback, it should help students who have either auditory and/or visual learning styles. Although the study used MP3 and other software, conducting a telephone conversation would also be very beneficial as an auditory component. Defazio et al. (2010) and Hassel and Ridout (2018) explained that students' scores improved when given the opportunity of draft submissions; students felt that drafts and obtaining support were valuable. This formative evaluation is more beneficial than a summative evaluation, as students have the opportunity to obtain feedback day-to-day, week-to-week throughout a given semester. It is essential for classes to be structured in this manner as this should hopefully eliminate a student's mindset of entitlement as well as a fraudulent behaviour of academic dishonesty (Sasso & Ross, 2020). Faculty and dissertation chairs need to have some level of applying strict behavioural expectations hopefully to increase student achievement alongside creating an environment for learning while encouraging integrity.

In a 2005 study by Roig and Caso, a reported 72% of college undergraduate students claimed that they had given at least one fraudulent

excuse. There is more to behavioural deviance when students commit acts of academic dishonesty from plagiarism to cheating, which is a dishonest behaviour of fraudulent excuses. Similarly, academic entitlement is associated with academic misbehaviour: a neutralising attitude that serves justification by using excuses not to complete a task (Sasso & Ross, 2020; Stiles et al., 2017; Stiles et al., 2018). Students who consider themselves entitled do not feel as though they need to provide an excuse for the simple reason that they feel entitled. People are entitled for so many reasons: gender, political views and even titles such as a student paying for a degree. Research has been conducted regarding the association between academic entitlement and academic dishonesty to include the cause that narcissistic behaviour is associated with entitlement (Stiles et al., 2017). Research indicated that students who display an increased level of entitlement will possibly participate in fraudulent behaviour (Parker, 2017). One factor to add is academic procrastination, applied to students who delay their tasks to complete assignments, projects and/or readings, especially on unpleasant, boring or difficult tasks. Students use this avoidant behaviour by hoping to obtain more time to work on an assignment; however, because the students wait until the last moment to begin research and writing, the students end up cheating and/or plagiarising (Carmichael & Krueger, 2014; Roig & Caso, 2005).

Carmichael and Krueger (2019) indicated that students used deceptive behaviour 66% of the time to avoid submitting a simple task worth 5% of their grade. As a result of procrastinating behaviours, students depend on creating excuses that are not factually sensible. Perhaps the time that students take to fabricate a goal-directed excuse could be sufficient to complete the task that they are avoiding. Over the past few decades, deliberately to deceive the professors, many studies illustrated fraudulent excuses such as computer/technological issues, being out of town, claiming to be ill, best friend died, both grandparents passed away and family emergencies; in addition, the students felt that they could gain more time and/or avoid the submission, as the students felt that the excuse had worked before, was a friend's idea or was just made up (Carmichael & Krueger, 2014). Carmichael and Krueger (2014) conducted a study with 319 undergraduates from freshman to seniors, where 226 participants acknowledged that they would ask for an extension by offering the following excuses: computer problems; power outages; sick child; family emergency; personal illness/flu; did not comprehend the assignment; work commitments; and extracurricular activities. An interesting factor was that 61% of the

respondents' results revealed that students would report a fraudulent claim to deceive the request for an extension. Professors need to set high expectations and strict guidelines to keep students from fabricating excuses, especially as faculty are submissive when questioning the integrity of the students' excuses, as students are well-versed in how to get away with deceptive excuses (Carmichael & Krueger, 2014).

Conclusion

Non-traditional doctoral students usually enter a degree programme already at a disadvantage with regard to personal and professional commitments and obligations. It can be a daunting experience. Dissertation chairs can help to alleviate the process by utilising some techniques to motivate and inspire their students. Peyton (2015) provided three recommendations for supporting adult doctoral students: (a) use effective communication; (b) be compassionate; and (c) be available. Baumann (2017) stated that the act of being visible and genuine with people will go a long way. There is a unique partnership between the dissertation chair and the student. Both sides must play their part for the collaboration to be productive. However, students must take ownership of their personal goals and establish time for completing the dissertation. All too often, dissertation chairs receive the "two e" Syndrome: excuses and entitlement, and it makes it difficult to be a student's supporter. On the other hand, the dissertation chair must respect the student and provide timely and substantial advice with compassion. As indicated in the *Compact*, the document is a declaration of commitment whereby each party pledges to complete her or his part of the two-way partnership. Without respect for each other and respect for the process, progress will be slow to non-existent. The key to a successful dissertation committee is effective communication, positive relationships and commitment.

References

Adams, R. V., & Blair, E. (2019). Impact of time management behaviors on undergraduate engineering students' performance. *Sage Open, 9*(1), 1. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018824506

Aeon, B., Faber, A., & Panaccio, A. (2021). Does time management work? A meta-analysis. *PLoS One, 16*(1), e0245066. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0245066

Aitchison, C., Catterall, J., Ross, P., & Burgin, S. (2012). "Tough love and tears": Learning doctoral writing in the sciences. *Higher Education Research & Development, 31*(4), 435–447. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2011.559195

Alani, F., Khan, F. R., & Hawas, A. (2020). Do time management factors impede students' academic achievement? A case-study. *Humanities & Social Sciences Review, 8*(4), 201–212. https://doi.org/10.18510/hssr.2020.8421

Bagaka, J. G., Badillo, N., Bransteter, I., & Rispinto, S. (2015). Exploring student success in a doctoral program: The power of mentorship and research engagement. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 10*, 323–342. http://ijds.org/Volume10/IJDSv10p323-342Bagaka1713.pdf

Baumann, N. A. (2017). The importance of effective communication: Some food for thought. *The Journal of Applied Laboratory Medicine, 1*(4), 460–461. https://academic.oup.com/jalm/article/1/4/460/5587437

Berry, S. (2017). Student support networks in online doctoral programs: Exploring nested communities. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 12*, 33–48. http://www.informingscience.org/Publications/3676

Black, R. (2012). The dissertation marathon. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research, 5*(2), 97–104.

Black, R. (2017). *E-Mentoring the online doctoral student from the dissertation prospectus through dissertation completion* [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden University Archive. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1109&context=sm_pubs

Bondie, R. S., Dahnke, C., & Zusho, A. (2019). How does changing "one-size-fits-all" to differentiated instruction affect teaching? *Review of Research in Education, 43*(1), 336–362. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X18821130

Brabazon, T. (2016). Winter is coming: Doctoral supervision in the neoliberal university. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Educational Studies, 3*(1), 1.

Bradbury-Jones, C., Irvine, F., & Sambrook, S. (2007). Unity and detachment: A discourse analysis of doctoral supervision. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 3*(3), 255–271. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690700600406

Burrington, D., Madison, R. D., & Schmitt, A. (2020). Dissertation committee chairs' current practices to support doctoral students in an online doctoral program. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 23*(3), 1. https://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/fall233/burrington_madison_schmitt233.html

Cairney, P., & Kwiatkowski, R. (2017). How to communicate effectively with policymakers: Combine insights from psychology and policy studies. *Palgrave Communications, 3*(37), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-017-0046-8

Carmichael, A. M., & Krueger, L. E. (2014). An examination of factors and attitudes that influence reporting fraudulent claims in an academic environment. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 15*(2), 173–185.

Carmichael, A. M., & Krueger, L. E. (2019). Research highlights how easily, readily students fabricate excuses. *Faculty Focus.*. https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/research-highlights-how-easily-readily-students-fabricate-excuses-2/

Carter-Veale, W. Y., Tull, R. G., Rutledge, J. C., & Joseph, L. N. (2016). The dissertation house model: Doctoral student experiences coping and writing in a shared knowledge community. *CBE Life Sciences Education, 15*(3), ar343. https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.16-01-0081

Casey, G. E., Saclarides Evthokia, S., & Lubienski, S. T. (2018). A difference in priorities. *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education, 9*(1), 38–57. https://www.proquest.com/central/docview/2039728854/4175EE398CF24DF6PQ/9?accountid=6579

Cavanaugh, A. J., & Song, L. (2014). Audio feedback versus written feedback: Instructors' and students' perspectives. *Merlot Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, 10*(1), 122–138. https://jolt.merlot.org/vol10no1/cavanaugh_0314.pdf

Cross, T. M. (2014). The gritty: Grit and non-traditional doctoral student success. *Journal of Educators Online, 11*(3), 1.

Cyril, A. V. (2015). The management and academic achievement of higher secondary students. *Journal on School Educational Technology, 10*(3), 38–43. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1097402.pdf

Defazio, J., Jones, J., Tannant, F., & Hook, S. A. (2010). Academic literacy: The importance and impact of writing across the curriculum – a case study. *Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 10*(2), 34–47. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ890711.pdf

Eby, L. T., Allen, T. D., Hoffman, B. J., Baranik, L. E., Sauer, J. B., Baldwin, S., Morrison, M. A., Kinkade, K. M., Maher, C. P., Curtis, S., & Evans, S. C. (2013). An interdisciplinary meta-analysis of the potential antecedents, correlates, and consequences of protégé perceptions of mentoring. *Psychological Bulletin, 139*(2), 441–476. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029279

Estrada, M., Zhi, Q., Nwankwo, E., & Gershon, R. (2019). The influence of social supports on graduate student persistence in biomedical fields. *CBE—Life Sciences. Education, 18*(3), 1. https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.19-01-0029

Fedock, B. (2017). Online dissertation chairs' perceptions on the role of reflective mentoring practices and changing student cross-cultural and generational worldviews. *Sage Open, 7*(2), 1. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017705421

Ferrer de Valero, Y. (2001). Departmental factors affecting time-to-degree and completion rates of doctoral students at one land-grant research institution.

The Journal of Higher Education, 72(3), 341–367. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2649335

Ghiasvand, A. M., Naderi, M., Tafreshi, M. Z., Ahmadi, F., & Hosseini, M. (2017). Relationship between time management skills and anxiety and academic motivation of nursing students in Tehran. *Electron Physician, 9*(1), 3678–3684. https://doi.org/10.19082/3678

Golann, J. W. (2015). The paradox of success at a no-excuses school. *Sociology of Education, 88*(2), 103–119. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040714567866. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4877134/

Grady, C. (2015). Institutional review boards: Purpose and challenges. *Chest, 148*(5), 1148–1155. https://doi.org/10.1378/chest.15-0706

Hassel, S., & Ridout, N. (2018). An investigation of first-year students' and lecturers' expectations of university education. *Frontiers in Psychology, 8*, 1. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.02218

Hill, L. H., & Conceição, S. C. O. (2019). Program and instructional strategies supportive of doctoral students' degree completion. *Sage Journals, 31*(1), 36–44. https://doi.org/10.1177/1045159519887529

Hineman, J. M., & Semich, G. (2017). Choosing a dissertation adviser: Challenges and strategies for doctoral students. *Inquiries Journal, 9*(3), 1. http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=1588

Holley, K., & Caldwell, M. (2012). The challenges of designing and implementing a doctoral student mentoring program. *Innovative Higher Education, 37*, 243–253.

Holmes, B. D., Robinson, L., & Seay, A. D. (2010). Getting to finished: Strategies to ensure completion of the doctoral dissertation. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research, 3*(7), 1. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1072664.pdf

Jairam, D., & Kahl, D. H., Jr. (2012). Navigating the doctoral experience: The role of social support in successful degree completion. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 7*, 311–329. https://doi.org/10.28945/1700

Johnson, C. (2015). *Understanding doctoral success factors in online education programs*. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2359&context=dissertations

Jongman, M. (2017). *The impact of social interdependence theory in supply chain management*. Paper presented at the 3rd IBA bachelor thesis conference, Enschede, The Netherlands.

Keel, V. A., & Bearden, M. R. (2020). *Increasing doctoral student completion rates within the College of Humanities and Sciences at Virginia Commonwealth University*. Virginia Commonwealth University, VCU Scholars Compass. https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=edd_capstone

Lovitts, B. E. (2001). *Leaving the ivory tower: The causes and consequences of departure from doctoral study*. Rowan & Littlefield.

Margerum, L. A. (2014). *Late completers: How and why non-traditional graduate students who exceed program timelines of 10 years ultimately complete the doctoral process* [Doctoral dissertation, Andrews University]. Andrews University Archive. https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dissertations/557

Mazerolle, S., Bowman, T., & Klossner, J. (2015). An analysis of doctoral students' perceptions of mentorship during their doctoral studies. *Athletic Training Education Journal, 10*(3), 227–235.

Miller, A. (2013). *Timely doctoral completion rates in five fields: A two-part study*. Graduate Theses and Dissertations. University of South Florida, Scholar Commons. https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/4827/

Muirhead, B., & Blum, K. D. (2006). Advising online dissertation students. *Educational Technology & Society, 9*(1), 1–8.

Muirhead, B., Robinson, G., & Simon, M. (2005). Working as the chair – tips to train online doctoral students for the mountain climb. In K. Blum & B. Muirhead (Eds.), *Conquering the mountain: Framework for successful chair advising of online dissertation students* (pp. 10–17). International Journal of Instructional Technology & Distance Learning.

Mutisya, E. N., Dinga, J. N., & Kinai, T. K. (2019). Students' perceptions of teacher support and academic motivation as predictors of academic engagement. *International Journal of Applied Psychology, 9*(5), 128–134. https://doi.org/10.5923/j.ijap.20190905.02

Nova Southeastern University. (2020). Fact book. https://www.nova.edu/publications/factbook/2020/index.html

Nova Southeastern University. (2021). Graduate catalog and student handbook. https://education.nova.edu/students/current-students/fcescj-2020-2021-graduate-catalog.pdf

Paolini, A. (2015). Enhancing teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes. *The Journal of Effective Teaching, 15*(1), 20–33. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1060429.pdf

Parker, L. L. (2017). *Competition and academic entitlement*. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4512&context=dissertations

Peyton, G. L. (2015). Best practices for supporting faculty in teaching adult doctoral students. *Academic Impressions*. https://www.academicimpressions.com/blog/how-faculty-can-more-effectively-support-adult-doctoral-students/

Ramaswamy, N. (2018). *Why is there more emphasis on teaching rather than learning in teaching-learning process?* Financial Express. ProQuest One Academic.

Roberts, L. A., & Bandlow, R. (2018). The goldilocks phenomenon: Are we helping doctoral students too much, too little or just right? *Journal of Higher Education Measurement, 32*(2), 62–80.

Roberts, L. A., Tinari, C. M., & Bandlow, R. (2019). An effective doctoral student mentor wears many hats and asks many questions. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 14*, 133–159. https://doi.org/10.28945/4195

Robinson, E. M., & Tagher, C. G. (2017). The companion dissertation: Enriching the doctoral experience. *Journal of Nursing Education, 56*(9), 564–566. https://doi.org/10.3928/01484834-20170817-10

Roig, M., & Caso, M. (2005). Lying and cheating: Fraudulent excuse making, cheating, and plagiarism. *The Journal of Psychology, 139*(6), 485–494. https://doi.org/10.3200/JRLP.139.6.485-494

Rusbult, C., & Lange, P. (2008). Why we need interdependence theory. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 2*(5), 2049–2070. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2008.00147.x

Sahito, A., & Vaisanen, P. (2017). Effect of time management on the job satisfaction and motivation of teacher educators: A narrative analysis. *International Journal of Higher Education, 6*(2), 213–224. https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v6n2p213

Sasso, M. T., & Ross, D. B. (2020). Academic entitlement and the K-20 System: The importance of implementing policies to better the education system. In J. O'Connor (Ed.), *Strategic leadership in PK-12 settings* (pp. 110–132). IGI Global.

Stiles, B. L., Pan, M., LaBeff, E. E., & Wong, N. (2017). *The role of academic entitlement in college cheating: A comparison between China and the United States* (Vol. 1, p. 33). *Research in Higher Education Journal*. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1178415

Stiles, B. L., Wong, N. C. W., & LaBeff, E. E. (2018). College cheating thirty years later: The role of academic entitlement. *Deviant Behavior, 39*(7), 823–834. https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2017.1335520

Sverdlik, A., Hall, N. C., McAlpine, L., & Hubbard, K. (2018). The PhD experience: A review of the factors influencing doctoral students' completion, achievement, and well-being. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 13*, 361–388. https://doi.org/10.28945/4113

Triplett, V. (2016). In the age of "no-excuses" schools: A case for compassion and better social-emotional learning. *EdSurge*. https://www.edsurge.com/news/2016-07-13-in-the-age-of-no-excuses-schools-a-case-for-compassion-and-better-social-emotional-learning-strategies

United States Department of Health & Human Services. (1979). The Belmont report: Office of the Secretary. https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/read-the-belmont-report/index.html

United States Department of Health & Human Services. (2021). Office for Human Research Protections. https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/

van Rooij, E., Fokkens-Bruinsma, M., & Jansen, E. (2019). Factors that influence PhD candidates' success: The importance of PhD project characteristics. *Studies*

in Continuing Education, 43(1), 48–67. https://doi.org/10.108 0/0158037x.2019.1652158

Virtanen, V., & Taina, J. (2016). What disengages doctoral students in biological and environmental sciences from their doctoral studies? *Studies in Continuing Education, 39*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2016.1250737

Young, S. N., Vanwye, W. R., Schafer, M. A., Robertson, T. A., & Poore, A. V. (2019). Factors affecting PhD student success. *International Journal of Exercise Science, 12*(1), 34–45. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6355122/

Zhao, C., Golde, C., & McKormick, A. (2007). More than a signature: How adviser choicse and adviser behavior affect doctoral student satisfaction. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 31*(3), 263–281. https://doi.org/10.1080/03098770701424983

On the Need for Women's Alliances in the Gendered Spaces of Doctoral Programmes and Academia: An Account of Challenges and Strategies

Carolin Müller

INTRODUCTION

In one of the pre-pandemic summers, I was given the opportunity to attend a conference to share progress on my doctoral research with an interdisciplinary and international group of junior and senior academics. My paper submission had undergone expert review, and my position as a white European woman doctoral student, who was studying at a North American institution at the time, had helped me to secure financial support to partake in the gathering. I was fortunate to have had the ability to join the event and proudly carried the conference badge around my neck, which identified me as a member of this community of researchers. Overall, the conference space tried to construct a kind of flexibility that temporarily

C. Müller (✉)
Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel

allowed participants to perform their academic selves, unbound from the restrictions of heteronormative gender politics that so often determine the way in which young women academics are able to enter and participate in academia.

In this environment, women academics of different positions in the scholarly community were able to come together, exchange experiences and reflect on one another's journeys as women trying to pursue a doctorate in contemporary academia. Over the course of the following years, our conversations continued and collectively we noticed similarities in the struggles that we faced but also in the strategies that we developed to position ourselves as young women scholars. The question recurred about the spaces within which women can develop an academic self. In other words, at issue is where women can exist and where they can make a place for themselves as early career researchers within the restrictive environment of academic institutions today.

Therefore, this chapter presents a collective account of women academics' different experiences in doctoral programmes in Europe and North America. I address the challenges and opportunities open to women academics to perform their academic selves within the contexts of academia, and specifically how these experiences are linked to women's perceptions of the heteronormative spatial geography of academia. It has been widely researched that the constraints of academic spaces continue to put women academics at a disadvantage (Bagilhole, 1993, 1994, 2002). However, the experiences specific to different women academics in doctoral training programmes need further articulation and reflection.

Writing this reflection on the collected account of women academics' stories from the vantage point of performance studies, I draw attention to the physical and the virtual spaces on academic Twitter, which my conversation partners have identified as an integral space of academia today. This part of the paper provides an account of strategies for creating alliances, visibility and authority in the contemporary international scholarly communities.

WOMEN ACADEMICS AND PERFORMING THE ACADEMIC SELF

Broadly construed, the notion of an academic self, as it is used in this chapter, refers to women's self-perception of who they can become as women in academia. Richard Shavelson et al.'s (1976) study of the self-concept in academic performance argued that the "self-concept is a

person's perception of himself…formed through his experience with his environment…, and [is] influenced especially by environmental reinforcements and significant others" (p. 411). The academic self-concept is part of the general self-concept and describes "one's academic self-perceptions or one's perception of one's ability in school" (Kadir & Yeung, 2016, p. 1). Complementary to Shavelson et al.'s work, this paper argues that the academic self-concept of a person is not only connected to how a person performs academically. The conditions under which an academic self can develop and exist must also be taken into account. That means that we have to acknowledge that the spaces of academia, its codes of behaviour and its regulations for access determine who a person can become.

The field of performance studies provides the concept of a performing self that helps us to understand how people become who they are. The notion of performance draws attention to the conditions under which people appear to others. Therefore, we can begin to grasp the role that the environments that we inhabit play in establishing oneself in the different spaces of academia. In order to perform one's self, Ervin Goffman (1956) wrote, the social characteristics that a person exhibits need to be recognised by others:

> when an individual projects a definition of the situation and thereby makes an implicit or explicit claim to be a person of a particular kind, he automatically exerts a moral demand upon others, obliging them to value and treat him in a manner that persons of his kind have a right to expect. (p. 6)

Therefore, the academic self of a person is not only dependent on how a person perceives her academic ability, as Shavelson et al. (1976) stated. Instead, the conditions, meaning the spatial conceptions and structures of academic spaces in terms of architecture and institutional organisation and management, matter for the kinds of possibilities that academics, and specifically women academics, have to express their academic selves and have those academic selves received as such with value by others.

For women academics, this raises questions of experiencing institutional and intellectual belonging. Growing into a young scholar is the pertinent goal of doctoral programmes. We frequently attend courses, workshops, conferences and informal intellectual gatherings. All of these are prominent occasions during which doctoral students are expected to shape their academic selves. Part of that process is aligning one's own academic self with disciplines, movements and intellectual belief systems. The

creation of the academic self in the doctoral programme is a process of material and conceptual crafting that is determined by reiterative practices and performances, in the sense of self-representation through material and verbal acts that are grounded in conventions (Butler, 1990; Crane, 2002).

In her study of performances of selves in medieval courts, Susan Crane (2002) convincingly explained that from the vantage point of performance studies "reiterative behavior recreates social identity, alters social relations, even reshapes beliefs and institutions" (p. 3). Therefore, the function of organising space in a specific way is to determine the behaviour, speech and appearance that people are expected to exhibit to mark their social positions. I argue that women academics develop an academic self by reflecting on how they perceive their ability to perform as an academic. In this context, the notion of being an academic is a gendered concept. By that I mean that academic spaces are not produced for different women to exist in them. Therefore, for many young women academics who are trying to develop a sense of academic self, it is difficult to do so because the conditions under which they attempt the journey do not recognise or make space for different women's needs.

Literature Review

While this chapter wants to draw attention to the gaps in research and the gaps in conversations about equity in academia, I by no means argue that the account presented here captures the whole picture. There is ample scholarship that details how academia leaves women at a disadvantage structurally, and the ways in which interpersonal interactions can perpetuate experiences of discrimination and the feeling at a constant disadvantage (Acker, 1983; Bagilhole, 1993, 2002; Bhatti & Ali, 2020; Morley & Walsh, 1995; Rhoads & Gu, 2012; Riordan & Louw-Potgieter, 2011; Thomas, 1996; West, 1995). Previous research placed the focus on discussing the influence of curriculum and disciplinary canons on perpetuating the low representation of women authors (Maddrell, 2015). We also know that there are gendered assumptions about intellectual capabilities with regard to women's care responsibilities (Toffoletti & Starr, 2016), and the quality of research by women (Lund, 2012; Wilson, 2005). Other scholars have focused on research productivity by women academics in different fields (Aiston & Jung, 2015; Kitchener, 2021; Over et al., 1990), and on institutional failure to promote women in particular fields (Howe-Walsh et al., 2016; Vohlídalová, 2021). This is an issue more broadly in

professorial positions across all disciplines (Ceci et al., 2014), and there is a lack of role models and informal support systems within academia (Bagilhole, 1994), in particular for Black women and People of Color scholars (Aryan & Guzman, 2010; Mokhele, 2013; Wright et al., 2007).

Scholarship about the experiences of women in academia resonates with much of what Judith Butler (1990) described in *Gender Trouble.* Butler explained that the concept of normative heterosexuality structures society in a way that a person's identity as a woman is discursively constructed. Laws, regulations and social rules assign women to specific social, economic and political positions, and ask women to perform those assigned positions by way of language, behaviour and thought. Sandra Acker (1983) commented: "The barriers to equality encountered by women academics have their roots deep inside the structure of higher education, itself influenced by norms and values of the wider society" (p. 88). The power allowed to women in academia is limited and the spaces in PhD programmes, tenure tracks and senior professorial positions are numbered.

As a result, spaces of action are, therefore, often micro-environments that women academics create for themselves within their departments or research groups, at conferences and in convivial practice. The goal of this chapter is to explore the spaces of action that women academics use in physical and digital environments to give insight into the function of academia's spatial geography.

Research Design and Data Collection

To understand what is working for women who are growing into careers in academia today, this project draws on a qualitative approach to provide opportunities for expressions of self-perception and individual perceptions of spaces in academia. Using collaborative ethnographic chats (Selleck, 2017), the study brings together the experiences of 14 women academics across disciplines and institutions (Table 6.1). The group of women who have contributed to this project are woman from different geographical origins, who pursued or are pursuing a doctoral degree in a European or North American context. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling via academic Twitter and via direct recruitment through my international network of women academics from different academic and non-academic institutions. The process of sampling produced a group of participants where some women recently completed their doctorate while

Table 6.1   Participants and their doctoral programmes

#	Pseudonym	Field of research	Geographical location of the doctoral programme	Status regarding the doctoral programme	Type of doctoral programme
1	Lena	Social Sciences	Europe	Recently completed the doctorate	Partially funded doctoral programme, not structured
2	Lin	Natural and Social Sciences	Europe	Quit her interest in a doctoral programme	Funded through a research grant, doctoral programme not structured
3	Lexi	Natural Sciences	North America	Quit the doctoral programme after four years	Funded through research grant and teaching assistantship, structured doctoral programme
4	Lydia	Social Sciences	North America	Finished her doctorate in the 1990s	Partially self-funded and financed, structured doctoral programme
5	Lily	Education	Europe	Current doctoral student	Funded through research position, structured doctoral programme
6	Lucy	Social Sciences	Europe	Current doctoral student	Funded through research grant, structured doctoral programme
7	Layla	Education	North America	Current doctoral student	Self-funded, structured doctoral programme
8	Louisa	Natural Sciences and Economics	North America	Recent doctorate	Funded through research grant, graduate school and teaching assistantship, structured doctoral programme
9	Liane	Computer Science	North America	Current doctoral student	Partially self-funded, partially through a teaching assistantship, structured doctoral programme

(*continued*)

Table 6.1 (continued)

#	Pseudonym	Field of research	Geographical location of the doctoral programme	Status regarding the doctoral programme	Type of doctoral programme
10	Leila	History and Humanities	Europe	Current doctoral student	Self-funded, doctoral programme not structured
11	Luna	History	Europe	Current doctoral student	Self-funded, structured doctoral programme
12	Lisa	History	North America	Recent doctorate	No information
13	Larissa	Social Sciences	North America	Recent doctorate	No information
14	Lorelei	Social Sciences	Europe	Current doctoral student	No information

others terminated their programme and academic work. One person is a senior academic. All participants were given pseudonyms to support anonymity, and were asked for information about the location of their doctoral programme, their current status regarding the doctoral programme and the type of doctoral programme (funding and structuredness through courses or cohort activities).

I conducted five semi-structured ethnographic chats via video chat (#1–#5) or in-person, and five semi-structured ethnographic chats via Twitter chat (#6–#10). Participants who were identified through Twitter were offered the opportunity to engage in this study more deeply through extended ethnographic chats via videoconferencing. I further received four short responses regarding Twitter as an academic space for women academics (#11–#14). Participants shared only a brief reflection on the issue, which is typical of the user behaviour associated with that particular social media platform. All contributions were labelled according to participants' geographical locations to support participant anonymity. Finally, the data were analysed using thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify pertinent and recurring themes in participants' contributions. I re-present central themes of these conversations in this chapter that speak

to the relationships of space, concept of self and performing as a woman academic in physical and virtual academic spaces.

The study participants' positionality reflected different experiences of privilege and precarity. I acknowledge that the experiences re-presented here speak to academics who self-identified themselves as women in the research. When I refer to women academics in this chapter, I do not mean the biological binary of men and women. Instead, I emphasise that the term "woman" refers to people who understand being a woman as part of their identity and who understand their means to perform themselves as women academics within the parameters that academia sets for women. There are nuances of difference in experiences by trans women academics that must be acknowledged in this respect, but that cannot be addressed in detail in this chapter. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from the data do not attempt to be representative of all women academics' experiences, especially the experiences of Black women academics. Nonetheless, the collected account offered in this chapter re-presents that there is breadth in the realities of different women academics who pursue a doctorate.

Physical and Virtual Architectures of Challenge and Opportunity

Already at the beginning of my investigation, the way of conducting the fieldwork with women academics took place in both physical and virtual worlds. On WhatsApp, Instagram or Twitter-chat, we would update one another on the progress of our PhDs, share our challenges and anxieties over making submission deadlines for chapter and full dissertation drafts, and illustrate moments of frustrations on this journey through GIFs and memes, as, for example, the PhD comics by Jorge Cham (2021). In person, we shared moments in which our collective physical presence could be understood as an expression of solidarity for one another. As the Covid-19 pandemic made such physical interactions ever more difficult, online spaces gained importance. In lieu of frequent in-person meetings with peers and academic mentors, for me and many others, #AcademicTwitter, a common hashtag that is used to start and follow conversations in the academic community on Twitter, became an extended network of peers of different disciplines, fields, specialisations, backgrounds, positions and experiences.

Instead of dropping in on events and conversations in the halls of academic buildings, we would drop into threads and comment sections. The accessibility of virtual platforms such as Twitter offered the opportunity to stay in touch with one's wider academic network through a myriad of different forms of engagement. It is possible to observe, listen in and participate in conversations related to the doctoral research. At the same time, there is a community of scholars in social networks such as Twitter with which we shared personal experiences of going through the process of the doctorate. Lily described her usage of Twitter as "a space where the personal and the professional meet".

The platform has different tools to personalise self-representation. Besides adding a profile picture, the short description of oneself in 160 characters allows users to choose their affiliations with institutions and the field. Pinning a specific tweet to amplify research or a thought process makes transparent the type of engagement that the user seeks. For Lily, Twitter's features to represent herself to others in a multi-sited way provided her with "the ability to act out more of her personal self and connect it to her professional [academic] self". For her, staying connected to peers via Twitter was crucial because she could be open about her experiences of discrimination and abuse in academia without fearing the same repercussions in her institution.

The opportunities that the virtual space presents to its users are the seemingly limitless chance to become involved in an existing space and to make it partially their own. The possibility to report discriminatory behaviour and to block people to protect oneself from online abuse provides its users with a sense that they can help themselves, and that they can rally others to come to their defence. Lydia, who reflected on her usage of the platform, stated that "connectivity gives people energy". Even though it takes time to "become part of a network and forge connections", Lydia said, Twitter can have a disruptive potential to interfere in the way that institutions treat women academics. The disruptive potential lies not only in organising in solidarity to support marginalised members of the academic community. There is also potential to change the notion that performing as an academic is only possible according to academia's normative heterosexual norms. For example, Lydia reported that she participated in a #shoetweetchallenge that was started in order to "represent a type of person in academia that defies the standard academic with Oxford shoes". Lydia explained that women often are not read as academics if they are not dressed a certain way. Showcasing a variety of different shoes that belong

to different academics, women academics in particular, was meant to challenge the institutional norms set for expressing one's academic self.

Throughout my conversations, my interlocutors noted that Twitter is in a sense one of the unique spaces of the virtual sphere of academia that adds possibilities where the physical world poses restrictions. Lily said that especially people who already experience restrictions in real life find new opportunities to interact differently with the scholarly community online. To Lily, Twitter provides an opportunity to get things "off your chest…slightly better than talking to a wall [because Twitter can function] as a safe space to express yourself in a space that you made yourself".

The idea that women in academia often perceive that they are "talking to a wall", as Lily phrased it, is a common observation (Bagilhole, 1993). Briony Lipton and Elizabeth Mackinlay (2017) argued that "it is very difficult for women to be heard and given the space to speak" (p. 75). In her analysis of women's place in philosophy, Justine McGill (2013) pointed out that the environments within which women seek an audience and participation employ "gender-based silencing tactics" that "[threaten] women's ability to survive and flourish in these places" (p. 198). On the one hand, the frustration of not being heard is a result of a lack of representation of women of different backgrounds in full-time professorial and research position across different fields and institutions (Crimmins, 2016). On the other hand, women academics continue to experience discrimination on the basis of their gender, race, ethnicity and care roles because "universities' gender equity policies fail in that they do not challenge pre-existent gender assumptions" (Lipton & Mackinlay, 2017, p. 75).

There are systemic means in place to prevent women academics from occupying positions of power and decision-making that would allow them to create spaces within which they can be seen on their own terms. Lipton and Mackinlay (2017) convincingly noted that academia is thus a space of ambiguities for women academics. Women academics cannot act out their academic selves if they are restricted from speaking or prohibited to speak, and if not given the chance to speak in a manner that makes space for women's needs and perspectives. Lipton and Mackinlay (2017) observed that, being "out of place" in this way, women academics silence their voices in order to fit into the social hierarchy of academia by way of "neutering" their language in order to appear "homologous" (p. 76) with their men peers.

Experiences that my conversation partners for this chapter shared resonated with this argument. Lexi explained that, when she entered her

doctoral programme, there were "not a lot of good living mentors" around and that being a woman in the field of natural sciences meant that she was not taken seriously by men academics. For her, pursuing a doctorate was linked to achieving a professional qualification to teach in higher education. The fulfilment of her sense of academic self should have been linked to achieving this goal. However, in her experience, natural science departments place little importance on teaching. Senior faculty used a degrading language to devalue teaching in favour of doing research. The reason for that was that most funding stems from research grants, which speaks to the neoliberal organisation of her department. In this environment, her personal goal to teach was an invalid goal. Senior scholars conveyed to her that, even though she occupied this academic space, her work did not contribute to the way in which the department could preserve its value. Consequently, she began to question her academic self, and she started to define it more by what she could not do than what she could do. Attempting the path of mirroring the goals of the men academics in her doctoral programme became a dreadful and frustrating experience for her, which produced a sense of regret of ever having started a PhD at all.

After deciding to leave her programme, Lexi explained that being forced to perform someone else's reality to be worthy of a place in academia was a problem. The rules of the space that you occupy determine who you can be. Even if there are spaces of support for women in academia, these spaces can quickly become silos and narrowing spaces, and yet another means for exclusion. Lexi perceived that the root of the problem was that "the people who train us can often not relate to us". For women academics, the realisation that we are not understood becomes so much a reality that we accept it, and when we finally find support, to put it in Lexi's terms, "having support [feels] weird and feeling weird about this feeling [is] weird".

The notion of feeling out of place and of having to adjust who we are to fit in can further be reiterated through the structure of the physical environments in academic institutions. While open door policies attempt to promote an approachability, doors can also become reminders of our worth, or lack thereof. When we stand in front of an advisor's office door after he had delayed yet another meeting with us but not with the men academics around us, we wonder, "Are we even worth his time?". Other advisors' doors become warning signs for when we might become subject to harassment so that we can alter our path through buildings accordingly.

Besides the symbolic function that doors can be roadblocks instead of entry points, there are many more spaces of (dis)comfort built into the architecture of academic spaces. With the many alley ways in buildings and on campus itself, it is often not possible to build a critical mass among scholars of different disciplines or fields. For women academics in pursuit of a doctorate, the architecture of campuses reinforces a sense of gatekeeping that disadvantages women from different backgrounds. My conversation partners and I reflected that we often sought out alternative spaces of exchange, and created our own gatherings and opportunities. Lin stated that the oppressive structures of academic spaces made her quit her path to research. For example, when invited to the table to share her ideas in a conference space that was dominated by men academics, she felt that she was not recognised as a valued conversation partner on research despite her expertise in the field.

Louisa and Lucy reported that the ability to engage with like-minded and supportive individuals in online communities helps to bridge the issue. Leila explained that she observed that

> diverse and female-led departments in some disciplines (usually ones that have an interest [in] or awareness of feminist theory) tend to create an environment that takes into account challenges that marginalized groups in academia such as women from diverse backgrounds tend to have.

Liane and other conversation partners made similar observations. The possibility to mirror a lived inclusivity in departments relates to how women academics perceive that they can exist within the architecture of academia. If it is acknowledged that academic practice is multi-sited, there would be no need to perform as Superwoman in all spaces of academic engagement. Being an authentic woman academic could then be conceived on other terms than the traditional academic frameworks. Further, taking into account that women's academics have worth and are a value to multiple sites of intellectual growth and practice could help to avoid the fear of accusations of co-opting oneself as a token in departments' gender statistics. There would be the option of counting women academics' contribution to the alternative spaces of knowledge production as part of their academic and personal achievements. When there is pride in one's own work, Lexi stated, we have more respect for ourselves and for what we do because we see ourselves in what we have achieved.

Throughout my conversations with women academics in this project, the issue recurred that women academics who are interested in a doctorate are in need of being able to experience this sense of acceptance. There is a need to know that, when you grow into who you want to become, there is much that we do not know and many mistakes that we will make. Therefore, we need to know that belonging in alternative spaces of contribution and exchange where we can gain the experiences and knowledge that will help us to grow is valid and valued. Even though collaborative spaces exist in both physical and virtual academia, the architecture of the academic environment reduces the visibility of these spaces by way of creating a contorted landscape of silos. While privacy for one's own academic work is certainly important, especially young women academics in doctoral programmes need networks with like-minded people to build community in a period of their professional development that poses many barriers.

Conclusion

For many of my conversation partners, the virtual opportunities of Twitter could do some of this work, as Luna, Lorelei, Larissa and others stated. Twitter's flatter hierarchy makes it much easier to interact, Louisa said. However, it also requires the digital literacy of its users, she cautioned. You have to learn how to benefit from the online community. All conversation partners noted that learning how to act and perform according to the expectations of different academic spaces requires learning how to make connections, how to perform relationships and how to present oneself as a woman academic.

The role of the advisor is crucial in this process. Lexi and Lin noted that good community encourages growth, and that, by being invited openly and without prejudice into scholarly communities, we can anchor ourselves within our fields of research. Relationship-building through intellectual exchange that is not bound by the gendered conventions of traditional academia can be helpful to establish a sense of belonging—for example, when you see your experiences as a woman PhD student reflected on Twitter, as Layla experienced. Discovering iterations of our networks in both the physical and the virtual world is motivating, and fosters confidence that we are right where we belong, Lena noted. When we feel that we can take up space and use a language that reflects how we want to be seen by others, we are more able and we trust ourselves more to live out

parts of our academic selves that we would otherwise keep hidden. Advisors who encourage this type of engagement with academic spaces and our own academic selves are the role models whom we need.

Therefore, this chapter concludes by positing that we need to challenge the architecture of academic spaces that often leave women academics, especially in the early stages of their careers as doctoral students, at a disadvantage. We need to make use of the spaces available to us in the physical and the virtual world to use our academic value in mentorship, advising, consultancy and translation of knowledge into non-academic spaces to make transparent that women academics' academic selves do not have to be bound by the normative structures of academia. Instead, we should be afforded the right to contribute in the manner(s) in which we would like our capabilities as women academics to be framed and in whom we want to serve with our knowledge.

REFERENCES

Acker, S. (1983). Women, the other academics. *Women's Studies International Forum, 6*(2), 191–201. https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(83)90010-9

Aiston, S. J., & Jung, J. (2015). Women academics and research productivity: An international comparison. *Gender and Education, 27*(3), 205–220. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2015.1024617

Aryan, B., & Guzman, F. (2010). Women of Color and the PhD: Experiences in formal graduate support programs. *Journal of Business Studies Quarterly, 1*(4), 69–77.

Bagilhole, B. (1993). How to keep a good woman down: An investigation of the role of institutional factors in the process of discrimination against women academics. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 14*(3), 261–274. https://doi.org/10.1080/0142569930140303

Bagilhole, B. (1994). Being different is a very difficult row to hoe: Survival strategies of women academics. In S. Davies, C. Lukelska, & J. Quinn (Eds.), *Changing the subject: Women in higher education*. Taylor & Francis.

Bagilhole, B. (2002). Against the odds: Reflections on women's research opportunities. In G. Howie & A. Tauchert (Eds.), *Gender, teaching and research in higher education: Challenges for the 21st century* (pp. 46–56). Routledge.

Bhatti, A., & Ali, R. (2020). Gender, culture and leadership: Learning from the experiences of women academics in Pakistani universities. *Journal of Education & Social Sciences, 8*(2), 16–32. https://doi.org/10.20547/jess0822008202

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706q p063oa

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble*. Routledge.

Ceci, S. J., Ginther, D. K., Kahn, S., & Williams, W. M. (2014). Women in academic science: A changing landscape. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 15*(3), 75–141. https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100614541236

Cham, J. (2021). *PhD comics: …Said no academic ever*. http://phdcomics.com/

Crane, S. (2002). *The performance of self: Ritual, clothing, and identity during the Hundred Years War*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Crimmins, G. (2016). The spaces and places that women casual academics (often fail to) inhabit. *Higher Education Research & Development, 35*(1), 45–57. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2015.1121211

Goffman, E. (1956). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. University of Edinburgh Press.

Howe-Walsh, L., Turnbull, S., Papavasileiou, E., & Bozionelos, N. (2016). The influence of motherhood on STEM women academics' perceptions of organizational support, mentoring and networking. *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal, 36*, 54–63. https://doi.org/10.18738/awl.v36i0.21

Kadir, M. S., & Yeung, A. S. (2016). Academic self-concept. In V. Zeigler-Hill & T. K. Shackelford (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of personality and individual differences* (pp. 1–8). Springer International Publishing.

Kitchener, C. (2021, April 24). Women academics submitting fewer papers to journals during coronavirus. *The Lily*. https://sakai.unc.edu/access/content/ group/1f997b9c-f1e4-4abb-9af9-1e1a231bc177/Resources%20on%20 COVID19/Women%20academics%20submitting%20fewer%20papers%20 to%20journals%20during%20coronavirus%20-%20The%20Lily.pdf

Lipton, B., & Mackinlay, E. (2017). *We only talk feminist here*. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-40078-5

Lund, R. (2012). Publishing to become an 'ideal academic': An institutional ethnography and a feminist critique. *Scandinavian Journal of Management, 28*(3), 218–228. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2012.05.003

Maddrell, A. (2015). To read or not to read? The politics of overlooking gender in the geographical canon. *Journal of Historical Geography, 49*, 31–38. https:// doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2015.04.013

McGill, J. (2013). The silencing of women. In K. Hutchison (Ed.), *Women in philosophy: What needs to change?* (pp. 197–214). Oxford University Press.

Mokhele, M. (2013). Reflections of Black women academics at South African universities: A narrative case study. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 4*(3), 611. https://www.richtmann.org/journal/index.php/mjss/article/view/518

Morley, L., & Walsh, V. (Eds.). (1995). *Feminist academics: Creative agents for change*. Taylor & Francis. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203482506

Over, R., Over, J., Meuwissen, I., & Lancaster, S. (1990). Publication by men and women with same-sex and cross-sex PhD supervision. *Higher Education, 20*(4), 381–391. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00136219

Rhoads, R. A., & Gu, D. Y. (2012). A gendered point of view on the challenges of women academics in The People's Republic of China. *Higher Education, 63*(6), 733–750. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-011-9474-3

Riordan, S., & Louw-Potgieter, J. (2011). Career success of women academics in South Africa. *South African Journal of Psychology, 41*(2), 157–172. https://doi.org/10.1177/008124631104100205

Selleck, C. (2017). Ethnographic chats: A best of both method for ethnography. *SKY Journal of Linguistics, 30*, 151–162.

Shavelson, R. J., Hubner, J. J., & Stanton, G. C. (1976). Self-concept: Validation of construct interpretations. *Review of Educational Research, 46*(3), 407–441. https://doi.org/10.2307/1170010

Thomas, R. (1996). Gendered cultures and performance appraisal: The experience of women academics. *Gender, Work & Organization, 3*(3), 143–155. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0432.1996.tb00055.x

Toffoletti, K., & Starr, K. (2016). Women academics and work–life balance: Gendered discourses of work and care. *Gender, Work & Organization, 23*(5), 489–504. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12133

Vohlídalová, M. (2021). Early-career women academics: Between neoliberalism and gender conservatism. *Sociological Research Online, 26*(1), 27–43. https://doi.org/10.1177/1360780420914468

West, J. (1995). The trouble with equal opportunities: The case of women academics. *Gender and Education, 7*(1), 51–68. https://doi.org/10.1080/713668454

Wilson, F. (2005). Caught between difference and similarity: The case of women academics. *Women in Management Review, 20*(4), 234–248. https://doi.org/10.1108/09649420510599061

Wright, C., Thompson, S., & Channer, Y. (2007). Out of place: Black women academics in British universities. *Women's History Review, 16*(2), 145–162. https://doi.org/10.1080/09612020601048704

Experiencing the Thesis and Its Multiple Strategies in the Start-Up Ecosystem in Montréal, Canada

Camille Thomas

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the methodological adjustments and strategies used for my anthropology dissertation by presenting my year of fieldwork research. My fieldwork research focused on collecting inductive data to clarify the link between conflict in the workplace and wellbeing at work in the start-up creation process among entrepreneurs in Montréal, Canada. More broadly, my dissertation focuses on the role of gamification of work and the entrepreneurs' motivations behind creating a start-up in order to analyse the way that conflicts in the workplace are resolved, avoided or found to be non-existent. The impression of wellbeing and happiness in the workplace may suggest that conflicts between individuals do not exist

C. Thomas (✉)
Département d'anthropologie, Université de Montréal,
Montréal, QC, Canada
e-mail: camille.thomas.1@umontreal.ca

in a seemingly healthy workplace with employees who work for pleasure, personal challenges and creativity (Flécher, 2019; Gaujard, 2008; Liu, 2017). Creating a start-up is a process whereby entrepreneurs are creating a company from scratch with formal and informal rules that they can adjust for themselves (Marty, 2002; Savignac et al., 2017; Thomas, 2021). In that context, creating a start-up may also be understood as an individual expression of a personal vision of the workplace. More specifically, these entrepreneurs can insert their own experience into their start-up, the workplace, the organisation, the management and so on (Thomas, 2021). How can data about a sensitive topic such as conflict resolution in the workplace be collected? How can questions be asked about conflict in the workplace where it seems not to be present or to be easily avoidable? How can research fieldwork be conducted in a workplace that is "in progress" such as that of a start-up? Finally, how has the recent pandemic context modified the data collected, and how do I adjust my research quickly with new strategies to accommodate these changes?

The principal aim of this chapter is to highlight the importance of avoiding trying to control the research context, and instead to focus on adjusting the tools and time needed given the resources that a doctoral student has. Conducting qualitative research is a dynamic process that we cannot control but instead that we frame with methodological tools while implementing new ones when needed. Consequently, in the first part of this chapter, I explain the particularities of my research, and why I needed to create and implement new methodologies. In the second part, I explain the tools that I used and the adjustments that I made to collect the data more effectively. Finally, in the third part of the chapter, I discuss the ways in which I conceived my research and how academic knowledge was shared, considering aspects such as adjustments made owing to the pandemic. I also share and discuss an example of a guideline that research students may follow to adjust their research project if ever it is affected by the unpredictable.

A Peculiar Research Context

Anthropology has, traditionally, relied on an inductive approach to frame its analysis of a research object (Weber, 2009). In fact, the inductive approach involves beginning with a set of empirical observations and interviews, seeking patterns in the data collected and theorising about the patterns found (Van Campenhoudt et al., 2017). The most common

strategy is to conduct preliminary research to evaluate more effectively the viability of the project.

This type of preliminary research involves aspects such as making contacts, introducing the purpose of our research, who we are as researchers and how the research works, and understanding the rules of the field. Though not obligatory, the preliminary research can help the students (and their supervisors) to navigate into the field, and to evaluate which methodological tools will be better to study their research questions. In my case, preliminary research was necessary to explore the geographical area of Montréal in order to study entrepreneurs and to see how open (or not) people and organisations were to this type of research. In turn, this helped me to make contacts for the current project, and helped me understand that Montréal has a small, yet specific, dynamic ecosystem where everyone seems to know everyone. Owing to the specificity of this context and the particular topic that I am studying, I could not compromise my research by not taking the time to understand the "milieu" and its rules, and by not making contacts before the start of the research. I had to explore and set a strategic plan from the beginning.

As a matter of fact, there is no academic literature about Montréal's ecosystem and conflict resolution among start-ups. Ecosystem defines the "milieu" where start-ups are taking place to grow. This term is used in the entrepreneurship literature, and by all the interviewees and the people whom I met during fieldwork. As a matter of simplification, I use this term throughout the chapter to define a particular environmental context in entrepreneurship. Then some non-profit organisations are helping entrepreneurs to gain some support from the city and the province. These organisations also created a census identifying general characteristics such as an inventory of the start-ups created, the number of co-founders and the number of start-ups working from their own working space or from co-working spaces (Bonjour Startup Montréal, 2020). There is also academic literature in entrepreneurship analysing different topics related to success and failure during the process of creating a company (Adizes, 1979; Witt, 2004). Outside anthropology, theories of entrepreneurship provide interesting conceptual approaches to discern how a company operates throughout its development (Miller & Friesen, 1984; Quinn & Cameron, 1983). Within the literature and in popular perceptions, entrepreneurs are seen as leaders and heroes who commit and live for the success of their company, but also as individuals exposed to various levels of stress throughout the creation process (Hmieleski & Baron, 2009).

Recently, they are also seen as individuals with mental health issues that often develop in that very same competitive process (Buquet et al., 2017). Traditionally, conflict resolution is a well-known topic in the anthropology of law, especially studied among vulnerable groups and often linked with human rights theories. However, entrepreneurs and start-ups are not an object of study in that discipline. Finally, the organisational theory developed by Colquitt et al. (2005) addresses employees' fairness, justice perceptions and job satisfaction in the workplace. Although a few researchers discuss the link between funding issues and fairness perception among employers such as entrepreneurs (Soenen et al., 2019), entrepreneurs are frequently conceptualised as "bosses" with power evolving in a dominant relationship with their employees.

In that theoretical context, my dissertation research is methodologically challenged. Firstly, to date, no research in the anthropological field has ever been conducted by anthropologists among entrepreneurs in a start-up ecosystem both within general contexts and within the specific context of Montréal. Secondly, there is a lack of qualitative research among entrepreneurs because entrepreneurship research is often focused on the organisation rather than on the individuals. In some cases, when the individuals are included in the analysis, the purpose is always to propose ways to avoid failure at the organisational level. For me, it is unfortunate to include individuals in the analysis while isolating individual challenges, given that individual challenges are not only a matter of success and failure for the company (Van Gelderen et al., 2006). Regarding that peculiar context and the purpose of my research, conducting preliminary fieldwork was a strategic choice to help me to create and implement new methodological strategies to collect my data.

From Observation to Strategic Ideas

One of the purposes of my dissertation project was to highlight and theorise the ways that individuals think and talk about conflicts in the workplace such as: known or taboo; and resolved or avoided. To know more comprehensively how it works, I first began a three-month long preliminary fieldwork during the summer of 2018 in the Montréal ecosystem. The preliminary analysis revealed four points:

(1) Creating a start-up was a personal choice stemming from a personal experience. For example, an individual who had had a bad

experience as an employee would prefer to start her or his own company to know where her or his work will benefit.

(2) Happiness and wellbeing were tools used to avoid conflict in the workplace, echoing the well-known phrase, "Happy employee, happy boss" (fieldwork, summer 2018).

(3) Entrepreneurial discourse suggested a need to enhance and strengthen motivation and behaviour continuously to ensure success at every level, so much so that even failures were considered a part of the success in their journey. For example, even if an entrepreneur cannot secure financial support, she or he has to understand the reason for this failure and to make the changes needed to succeed.

(4) Conflicts in the workplace did not exist, even if some individuals were upset or unhappy. For example, one of my interviewees said, "*Issues could happen but conflict – it's too big. It's when something is bad when something does not work at all*" (fieldwork, summer 2018).

As a matter of fact, conflict was not seen as taboo, but instead it seemed simply not to exist for the entrepreneurs whom I interviewed, which led me to the question of why this might be. The answer to this question might simply be because they were doing their best at avoiding having to deal with conflict altogether.

With this in mind, I had to think of a strategic way of letting the participants talk about workplace situations with minimal interference from the interviewer (my personal self) and the researcher's research interests (my anthropological self). Studies have shown that researchers influence the "milieu" that they are studying, including anthropologists (Stoller, 2009). For instance, as a White, young, educated and foreign woman from France studying in Quebec for almost ten years, I can have both a positive and a negative impact on the data collected. It could be easier for me to recruit some people more so than others. Some people could be intimidated and suspicious of being interviewed by me more so than others. Similarly, I could be more intimidated or uncomfortable conducting some interviews with people whom I am not used to being around or in some places where I do not feel safe. The influence is on both sides, and as an anthropologist I must be aware of these limitations, even if I am doing my best to conduct a very inclusive research project. To accomplish my work, I conducted (before the pandemic) 15 interviews with entrepreneurs and people from the ecosystems by having them describe potential disagreements, and by

asking them to elaborate on how they handled these situations. Moreover, during my fieldwork, entrepreneurs were curious about my thesis, and I had no trouble recruiting them. The most difficult part was their availability, even if they were interested in being part of the research. In the beginning, some of them were very concerned about the results and the analysis that I would publish because it was linked with wellbeing at work and mental health. Mental healthy was their answer when I asked about wellbeing at work. For them, there is a lack of research and resources among entrepreneurs about mental health. Talking about mental health is still taboo and a difficult topic to share without being pointed out. Finally, they were curious about my research coming from anthropology and not from a business school. I had to explain what anthropology was and why it was important to study individual entrepreneurs themselves, and not only their companies.

First, I chose not to use the word "conflict" (or any word that may imply such an idea) in my interview guide. I selected open-ended questions that let the interviewee answer and speak freely. For example, I chose to ask them questions about the recruitment of new employees. Rather than focusing on the weaknesses (of potential new employees) that they were trying to avoid during recruitment, they talked about the most important qualities for which they were looking during the interviews. By focusing on qualities, they immediately compared both positive qualities and qualities seen as weaknesses. The entrepreneurs interviewed often explained what had gone wrong in the past, and eventually they labelled the situations as conflicts, issues or disagreements, or as emerging from clashes of personalities between themselves and their employees. Throughout the interviewing process, I collected rich and detailed information, which allowed me to continue to proceed in a similar vein for the next ones. In the end, whether they labelled them as such, they openly discussed conflicts that they had experienced without the interviewer (me) asking about them directly. The implementation of this strategy avoided performative answers or having them simply answer "No".

Second, I created two *ethnofictional stories* that I used in my interview guide to introduce two different and personal topics without asking a direct question, which could have been seen as intrusive. Known initially as an ethnographic documentary, *ethnofiction* is a cinematographic genre developed by Jean Rouch (filmmaker and ethnologist), who mixes documentary and fiction to stage characters from the reality observed by the anthropologist (Norris, 2004). For my dissertation project, I created these

two short stories inspired by ethnofiction that I named "*ethnofictional stories*" to connect more effectively with my interviewees without re-orienting and interfering with their answers with a semi-open question. *Ethnofiction* cannot be reduced to cinema only; it is also a fictional literary work that is constructed and that takes place by the observation of social reality. Mine were written from my preliminary research data and my readings of biographical books of entrepreneurs. In this case, *ethnofiction* was used as a necessary tool for the development of the interview guide. Those stories allowed me to collect personal points of view from the experience of entrepreneurs. The first *ethnofictional story* highlighted a character, Samantha, who chose to quit her job where she was unhappy at many levels to do what makes her happy by starting her own business throughout hard times. The aim of this story was to let those being interviewed talk about the personal motivation that had led them to where they stand with their start-up. The second *ethnofictional story* highlighted another character, Claire, working in a start-up, dealing with a very busy schedule that led her to ask for a day off because she was unable to enjoy a proper evening or weekend without working. The aim of this story was to talk about working conditions in the workplace, especially what they wanted for their company and their employees.

Finally, every strategy that I chose during my research was part of my vision of research itself. I believe that it is important to think not only for my own dissertation research or field but also for research at large. Conducting research is also a way to contribute to others and their own research by being able to adapt and experiment with tools and methodologies in different contexts.

I believe that, in some ways, conducting a research project is a cyclical process that always starts and finishes the same way by exploring an interest in a topic and studying it with the methodology that each discipline has. From the beginning to the end, there is a lot to experience as a researcher. Different factors influence and lead a research project to its end, but also the different steps to conduct it (see Fig. 7.1). As can be seen in Fig. 7.1, I theorise my research project as a cloud with stages (round coloured) and factors (grey rectangles) that influence each other. At the beginning of every research project, a literature review is necessary, and it will help you to elaborate your project, which already comes from personal interests and academic interests. As long as you are conducting your research project, you will have to deal with the unpredictable, such as unknowns, strategies and adjustments. This cloud is here to help you to
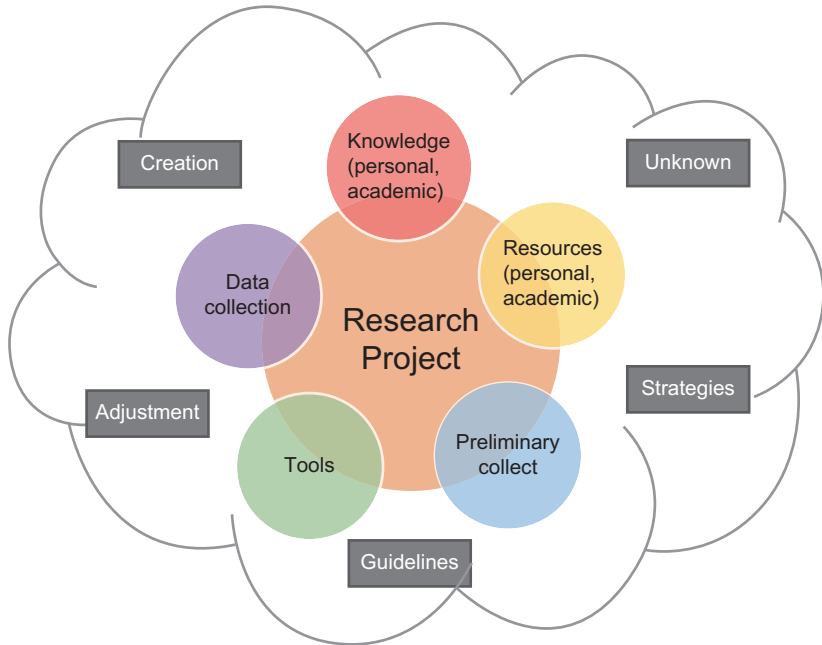
Fig. 7.1 The cloud of processes of a research project

remember that a research project is not linear at all, and that you will have to adjust yourself and your research to balance the unpredictable to keep going and to succeed (see Table 7.1). The most important thing is to be aware that everything is possible, knowing your stages and factors, with your own experience and what is available to you to ensure your success and to finish your research project.

Adjusting and Balancing the Unpredictable

Academia does not encourage doctoral students to think outside the box at first. My own experience has shown that academic research can also be useful not only to peers but for the general public as well. I believe that, depending on the degree of curiosity and interest of the general public, completing a dissertation in anthropology about entrepreneurs and start-ups is just as interesting for academia as it is for the general public. It is a

Table 7.1 Examples of how to adjust to and balance the unpredictable during a research project

Knowledge & Resources	*Building a research project from ideas and interests*
	How to make an idea a realistic research project?
	- List your personal and academic knowledge (what do you like? what are you curious about? Do you have any preferencial topic? What literature can help you to fill the gaps in academia?).
	- List your personal and academic resources (degrees, experiences, interest, money, time, professors, contacts).
Unpredictable	*Things you will never plan but have to deal with by finding the most realistic strategy*
	What is not under my control?
	- List everything that is affecting your project that you cannot control or stop. For example, you need an old edition of a book for your literature review, but it is not available at your university library. You can try other libraries in your city, international exchange library programs or read a summary online by the time you get the book.
	What is under my control?
	- List everything that is affecting your project that you are able to control and stop. For example, you need a surgery and need time to recover. You can plan your time off and reschedule your plan.
Preliminary fieldwork	*Exploring the 'milieu' of your research project*
	How to make your project realistic?
	- List your academic aims for this preliminary research.
	- List your personal and academic strengths and use them to collect data.
	- List your methodological protocol to achieve this preliminary research.
Unpredictable	*Things you will never plan but have to deal with to find the most realistic strategy*
	What is not under my control?
	- List everything that is affecting your project that you cannot have control or stop. For example, being unable to recruit enough people. You can take your time to analyse the 'milieu' and see what is not working in this context.
	What is under my control?
	- List everything that is affecting your project that you are able to control and stop. For example, being able to adjust your interview guide if you realise that the interviewee is having difficulty providing an answer in this context.

matter of sharing common reflections on society about a particular subject. Entrepreneurship is everywhere around us and a part of the economic growth plan (as a society and as individuals). Almost everyone has to work for a living; therefore, happiness, wellbeing at work and conflict resolution in the workplace are phenomena that many people must experience in Western societies. These are some of the reasons why completing a dissertation and conducting fieldwork were not only about me and the topic that I like, but also relevant to improving academic and general knowledge. Strategic planning is not as complicated as it seems at first. The first step is to identify personal and academic knowledge available depending on your research project. Second, the personal and academic resources are needed to add to the previous point. The third step is to accommodate the two previous points in order to make your research project realistic. However, being prepared and developing strategies do not mean that everything will go according to plan. For instance, no one had anticipated the Covid-19 pandemic, but it has affected all of us both personally and professionally whether or not we were conducting research when it happened. In my case, in the end, the pandemic helped me to collect very pertinent data about an unstudied topic in anthropology, but it could have been a complete disaster if my fieldwork had been impossible to conduct online. In fact, Table 7.1 is something that I want to share with the students or the researchers who will read this chapter. The main goal of this

table is to help them to navigate the unpredictable through a guideline. This is not a perfect plan to follow, but rather a tool to keep in mind when something unpredictable happens. It is better to be able to try something realistic than to quit an unfinished project. Table 7.1 will help you to figure it out by explaining how you can adjust your research project, depending on which stage (see Fig. 7.1) happens to be affected by an unpredictable situation.

As a matter of fact, when the pandemic began in Canada in March 2020, I was set to finish my fieldwork at the end of May of the same year, with only a few interviews and observations left to complete when the lockdown started. All activities and meetings were shut down for a week to let everyone think and adapt themselves to the "working from home" context. Once this period had passed, it felt like everything was almost back to normal even if it were online. I was able to observe and interview people from a distance. I was quite busy for three main reasons, all of which were unpredictable situations caused by the pandemic. I had to deal with these changes using my own experience as a young researcher. Everything that you will try to adjust during your research will depend on your own personal and academic experience, allowing you to find the best balance that you can to finish your research project (see Table 7.1).

The first reason was that I had to amend my ethical process and agreement with the Research Ethics Board Committee because the fieldwork was now online, and we did not know for how long. For example, before the pandemic, interviews were conducted in a coffee shop or somewhere confidential and quiet. During the pandemic, interviews were now being conducted by telephone or via Zoom. Nonetheless, I had to obtain consent from the interviewee to record the interviews, but I continued to use a personal recorder rather than the recording option from the Zoom application to ensure confidentiality. Without this accommodation from the Board, I would have no longer been able to finish my research fieldwork, and I would not have benefited from the positive side of the pandemic that led me to relevant data and to reflection analysis. This was an unpredictable situation, and I found the solution to pursue it by adjusting some rules.

The second reason was about the modification of my research project itself owing to the pandemic, and how collecting some data revealed that conducting a longitudinal study would be relevant in that context. I had to inform my supervisor but also the Research Ethics Board Committee about these changes. Many of these changes were technical, but the

original plan had changed as well. For instance, before the pandemic, I was supposed to interview 20 entrepreneurs only once during my fieldwork. During the pandemic, I quickly realised during my early observations that the uncertain context impacted on the entrepreneurs whom I had already interviewed and their start-ups. As a result, instead of conducting only one interview with entrepreneurs as initially planned before the pandemic, I completed two more interviews with the interviewees (those who were available) during the first lockdown (spring 2020), and in fall 2020 when it was supposed to end. The aim of the three interviews was to compare their experiences before, during and after the pandemic to understand better how they were dealing in that context while creating their start-up, and how they were managing to stay afloat. Thus, an interview guide was created for two additional interviews that I added to my methodology. As with the first reason above, adjusting your research project is necessary to pursue and collect interesting data that you might not obtain owing to the unpredictable situation that you are experiencing. Your project does not need to end just because there is an unpredictable situation. In my case, it was easier to adjust my project because I was not starting from the beginning with the recruitment of interviewees. I asked only those whom I had already interviewed to see if they were interested in participating in two more interviews. Some were available, but not everyone, which was also satisfactory. This is a good example of finding an alternative to adjust an unpredictable situation affecting my fieldwork and my thesis in the end.

Lastly, the third reason why I was kept busy was the chapter that I wrote at the end of summer 2020 to share relevant aspects of the pandemic context created among entrepreneurs. One of the most relevant highlights was the creation and the analysis of a professional ethos specific to entrepreneurs who were in the process of creating a start-up and dealing with all the rules and norms that they had to face and to create in order to survive. In the end, my dissertation journey was clearly about adjusting and balancing the unpredictable by using all the resources available to me to succeed and finish it (see Table 7.1).

Conclusion

I believe that every strategy that I chose to conduct my research was part of my vision of research itself. It is important to think not only about my own dissertation research or field but also about research at large.

Conducting research is also a way to contribute to others and their own research by being able to adapt and experiment with tools and methodologies in different contexts.

In the first part of the chapter, I explained the particularities of my research in anthropology about entrepreneurs in the process of creating a start-up, and why I needed to create and implement new methodologies. Second, I explained the tools that I used and the adjustments that I made to collect more effectively the data in a particular context, such as avoiding the use of the word "conflict" and the use of *ethnofictional* stories. In the third and last part, I addressed the ways in which I conceived my research and how I tried to find the best strategies to achieve my dissertation and to share what I found with academia and with the general public in a regular or in a pandemic context.

I have been trying to show throughout this chapter that conducting a research project must be planned to understand its aim more fully. However, research in the social sciences will always be an "unpredictable" process from beginning to end, given that the research is only as organic as our object of study. As you read in this chapter, many theoretical, methodological and ethical adjustments were made before and during the pandemic. The experience that I share here is only mine, but it helps to emphasise that a research project, such as a dissertation, is a journey with different paths to take and obstacles to overcome. It is important to be aware that there will always be different strategies needed depending on your knowledge, resources and environmental context.

References

Adizes, I. (1979). Organizational passages—diagnosing and treating lifecycle problems of organizations. *Organizational Dynamics, 8*(1), 3–25.

Bonjour Startup Montréal. (2020). *Portrait de l'écosysteme* [Portrait Ecosysteme Entrepreneurial Montréalais]. https://www.bonjourstartupmtl.ca/a-propos/qui-nous-sommes/

Buquet, R., Luca, N., & Bouilloud, J.-P. (2017). Malaise dans les start-up. Entre désir héroïque et anxiété créatrice. *Nouvelle Revue de Psychosociologie, 2*, 93–111.

Colquitt, J. A., Greenberg, J., & Zapata-Phelan, C. P. (2005). What is organizational justice? A historical overview. In *Handbook of organizational justice* (pp. 3–56). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Flécher, M. (2019). Les start-ups, des entreprises «cools» et pacifiées? Formes et gestion des tensions dans des entreprises en croissance. *La Nouvelle Revue du Travail, 15*, 1. https://doi.org/10.4000/nrt.5930

Gaujard, C. (2008). Vers un nouvel idéaltype organisationnel: Une application de la méthode wébérienne aux start-up actuelles. *Innovations, 1*, 163–182.

Hmieleski, K. M., & Baron, R. A. (2009). Entrepreneurs' optimism and new venture performance: A social cognitive perspective. *Academy of Management Journal, 52*(3), 473–488. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2009.41330755

Liu, T. (2017). Qu'est-ce qu'un startuper? *Agora Debats/Jeunesses, 1*, 117–130.

Marty, O. (2002). La vie de Start-up (s') Investir dans les entreprises innovantes. *Gérer et Comprendre : Annales des Mines, 67*, 4–15.

Miller, D., & Friesen, P. H. (1984). A longitudinal study of the corporate life cycle. *Management Science, 30*(10), 1161–1183.

Norris, A. (2004). L'œuvre filmique de Jean Rouch: L'objectif du colonisé sur le colonisateur. *Dalhousie French Studies, 67*, 155–161.

Quinn, R. E., & Cameron, K. (1983). Organizational life cycles and shifting criteria of effectiveness: Some preliminary evidence. *Management Science, 29*(1), 33–51.

Savignac, E., Andonova, Y., Lénel, P., Monjaret, A., & Seurrat, A. (2017). *Le travail de la gamification : Enjeux, modalités et rhétoriques de la translation du jeu au travail*. Peter Lang.

Stoller, P. (2009). The power of the between: An anthropological odyssey. In *The power of the between*. University of Chicago Press. https://www.degruyter.com/document/; https://doi.org/10.7208/9780226775364/html

Soenen, G., Eib, C., & Torrès, O. (2019). The cost of injustice: Overall justice, emotional exhaustion, and performance among entrepreneurs: Do founders fare better? *Small Business Economics, 53*(2), 355–368.

Thomas, C. (2021). «Tirer son épingle du jeu» : Perception d'injustice, santé et ajustement à la crise de la Covid-19 parmi les entrepreneurs à Montréal. In *Perceptions de justice et santé au travail: L'organisation à l'épreuve* (pp. 185-210). Presses de l'Université Laval.

Van Campenhoudt, L., Marquet, J., & Quivy, R. (2017). *Manuel de recherche en sciences sociales* (5th ed.). Dunod.

Van Gelderen, M., Thurik, R., & Bosma, N. (2006). Success and risk factors in the pre-startup phase. *Small Business Economics, 26*(4), 319–335.

Weber, F. (2009). *Manuel de l'ethnographe*. PUF.

Witt, P. (2004). Entrepreneurs' networks and the success of start-ups. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development, 16*(5), 391–412.

Deconstructing the "Ph" in "PhD"

S. Jonathan Whitty and Bronte van der Hoorn

Thaumázein: the shocked wonder at the miracle of Being, is the
beginning of all philosophy (Arendt, 2019)

INTRODUCTION

Most students commence a doctorate in the hope of solving a problem, or
more vaguely, to find answers. But deriving new insights and making an
original contribution requires thinking about your thinking to reveal fun-
damental assumptions that constrain your research and that limit your
findings. This thinking about your thinking can be considered *the action*
of philosophical inquiry or philosophising. While information is pervasive
in today's world, philosophising helps to reveal the problems with knowl-
edge (Barnacle, 2005). Through philosophising, we experience the slip-
periness of knowing and its inherent partiality. Arguably, beyond their
discipline content expertise, doctoral graduates need to be aware of the
problematic nature of knowing (Barnacle, 2005).

S. J. Whitty (✉) • B. van der Hoorn
University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, QLD, Australia
e-mail: jon.whitty@usq.edu.au

However, we are in an era where professional and discipline-based doctorates sit alongside the philosophical doctorate (PhD), and there is increasing commodification of the doctoral process (Taylor, 2012). Doctoral supervisors are increasingly overcommitted to various university goals, and students have fixed timeframes for submitting their theses (Taylor, 2012). This prompts us to provide a deconstruction of the case for sustaining philosophising in doctorates—of all types. Whilst often marginalised or undervalued (Janack, 2017), philosophy is central to the development of an original contribution (Oftedal, 2014) and to research candidate transformation (Barnacle, 2005).

Today, if we say that someone is philosophising, we regard this to mean that she is theorising or speculating about a serious matter in a rather pompous way. But, as Hannah Arendt (2019) reminded us, this is not how Plato (2014) or Aristotle (2018) considered it. They distinguished it from contemplation, which they considered the internal motion of the mind that accompanies the motion of the body when absorbed by a task. For them, philosophising resulted from "thaumázein", which is the experience of wonder, of being overcome by one's thoughts, to such a point where one is motion-less. It is not a eureka moment, but a reflexive wonder at one's ability to discover new thoughts. For Aristotle (2018), thaumázein drives philosophising, as it taps our desire "to escape from ignorance" (Refer Section "The Evolution of Doctorates").

Our proposition is unfolded as follows, with the aim of inspiring doctoral supervisors and candidates to engage with philosophy in doctoral education. We begin with an explanation of the driver for our deconstruction in terms of an account of the roots and evolution of the doctorate. This is followed by our primary discussion, which includes the rationale for wrestling with philosophy in doctoral studies, the challenges that candidates encounter when thinking about their thinking and the strategies to overcome these challenges. Each of these sections draws on the narratives provided by eight students who are either undertaking or have completed their doctoral studies. Their qualifications range from philosophical doctorates to doctorates of education, and their subject areas range from information systems, to psychology, to business. To conclude, we provide a nod to Derrida's (1968) deconstruction process, and we point to the thaumázein moments in the narratives, and we reason that when we say "doctorate" what we are trying to communicate are the conditions required to achieve thaumázein moments.

The Evolution of Doctorates

The nature and purpose of a doctoral qualification are increasingly contested (Fulton et al., 2012; Park, 2007; Wellington, 2013). Wellington (2013) argued that today doctorates share more of a family resemblance than a homogeneity, and "what it is" (p. 1491) has changed over time and across regions. This adaptation and apparent diversification of the doctorate over time are of interest to this chapter as they contextualise the role of philosophy and its potential impact on the doctoral experience, irrespective of its nature and purpose. What is the role of philosophy in doctorates? To create an intellectual space for candidates to philosophise—to experience transformational thaumázein moments. A brief account of the doctorate experience over time is shown in Fig. 8.1.

In Book VIII of *The Politics*, Aristotle (2009) discussed the experience of teaching, learning and philosophising. He stated that it is owing to our natural state of wonder—thaumázein (Aristotle, 2018)—that we began and continue to philosophise, and that it is where we seek knowledge in order to escape our ignorance, not for any utilitarian end but for its own pleasurable sake. For him, teaching is the actualisation of learning, as one can teach oneself or teach another. In medieval times, under an
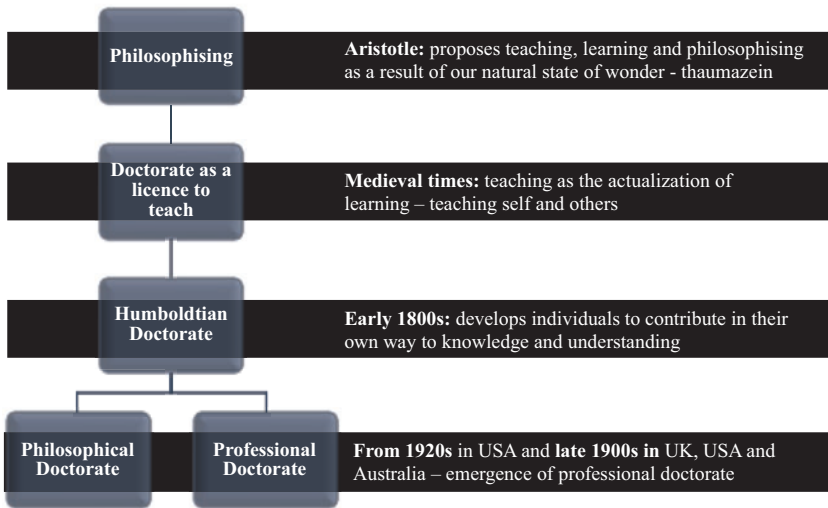

Fig. 8.1 An abridged history of the doctoral qualification

apprenticeship model, those with a passion for philosophising were awarded a licence to teach (a doctorate) at a university (Park, 2005; Probst & Lepori, 2008). The Latin phrase "philosophiae doctor" means "teacher of philosophy" (Park, 2007, p. 4).

What has come to be known as the Humboldtian doctorate (circa the early 1800s) embraces the Humboldtian model of higher education (inspired by Aristotle), where students become autonomous individuals and participatory citizens by developing and exercising their powers of reasoning. Framed this way, doctorates had the purpose of enabling individuals to fulfil their potentiality holistically in their own way (Josephson et al., 2014), consequentially contributing to knowledge and understanding through research (Taylor, 2012).

Compared to the Humboldtian single supervisor model, today's doctoral candidates are often supported by a multidisciplinary supervisory team. And, rather than "taking as long as it takes", doctorates today have fixed completion timeframes. Traditionally, doctorates were completed by a rare few, whilst today doctoral qualification are subject to massification. Rather than a "master-apprentice" model, there is a commodification towards the supervisor and candidate being in a "producer-consumer" exchange (Taylor, 2012, Table 1). These changes in candidature experience result in altering the conditions for philosophising. For example, the nature of supervisory support may be less personal, the journey more systematic (owing to increased institutional regulations) and the time available to attend to the nature of truth and knowledge may be pressurised.

In addition to these changes in the doctoral experience, the late 1900s saw a diversification in doctoral qualifications through the rise of the professional doctorate (Fulton et al., 2012). The naming conventions commonly exclude the term "philosophy" in preference to an industry or domain signifier—for example, Doctorate of Nursing or Doctorate of Engineering. As early as 1921, Harvard awarded a Doctorate of Education (Jones, 2018). But it was much later that professional doctorates became more widely adopted in the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom (Taylor, 2012). In contrast to the philosophical doctorate, professional doctorates have a market-oriented focus with the purpose of solving a candidate's workplace or professional practice problem (Edwards, 2008), and a focus on "producing researching professionals" rather than on "producing researchers" (Taylor, 2012).

It is in this environment of a changing doctoral experience and doctoral qualification diversification that we deconstruct, through the narratives of

eight doctoral candidates (we have used the aliases of Jane, Savindya, Louise, Shreya, Tom, Ingrid, Albert and Fernando), the role of philosophy in the doctoral experience and beyond, the challenges that it presents to candidates and strategies for deriving the maximum benefits that thinking about your thinking can provide.

The Case for Philosophising

The influences and impacts of philosophising on a candidate's doctoral experiences vary. These influences and impacts are not contained to the period of candidature, but in many cases they have a persistent and broader transformational impact on life. In this section, the diversity in the role and benefits of philosophy in doctoral studies is explored with the purpose of revealing the case for why there is merit in philosophising.

The Influence and Impact on Doctoral Candidature

It Informs and Enhances Research Methodology and Analysis
It is common for candidates to first encounter philosophy when designing their research methodology. Choice of methodology has embedded assumptions relating to the nature of truth (ontology), legitimate knowledge (epistemology) and values (axiology), and it is critical that candidates understand the foundations upon which any knowledge that they develop is created (Bracken, 2010; Butts & Lundy, 2003). Understanding terms such as "ontology" and "epistemology" is not always easy, but as Ingrid described this mastery is important: "I had to understand the difference between ontology and epistemology—words I have always had problems with—and how this applied to my study design." She commented on how it informed her "thinking about" the structure and analysis of her thesis. Similarly, Fernando saw that original discipline theories underpinned his research questions, and he leant on the methodological choices of previous studies to legitimise his own methodological choices. Savindya reflected on the importance of ensuring alignment between her philosophical framework and her subsequent design choices. Philosophy's impact may also be narrower in breadth, as Shreya pondered on how philosophy influenced the nature of the questions that she asked her research participants, and Albert used philosophy to shape his data analysis framework.

It Reveals Deep Insights About the Topic Area

Often candidates enter a doctorate with a desire to understand better the problems that they have encountered in the world. Philosophy can be a tool to reveal underpinning issues that contribute to the troubling symptoms that they have encountered (Pring, 2012), and connections and contexts that have not previously been considered (Butts & Lundy, 2003). Shreya saw that "the contribution of philosophy is critically important to be able to engage at a higher cognitive level required for complex doctoral study", and she noted that her examiners specifically highlighted the value of her philosophising in her thesis. Jane also saw philosophy as helping her to develop a "much deeper understanding of my topic", and that it enabled her to move beyond "surface level" understandings. This is important for Jane as she wanted to understand how her work fitted "within the world/ knowledge/society". The ability for philosophy to reveal from where the different ideas that underpin a discipline come is also of great benefit to Tom and Fernando. Fernando emphasised this benefit, stating, "This depth of understanding [that engaging with philosophy provides] has helped me beyond what I could have ever imagined, beyond just reading journals and attending conferences." Tom considered that philosophy better connects his research to the real world.

It Enables the Development of Logical Arguments

Every thesis should be underpinned by a central line of argument and requires the ability to reason coherently (Holbrook et al., 2014). Philosophy can also be a tool in developing this skill, as it helps to reveal gaps in logic and where assumptions are made that are not explicit. Savindya stated plainly that through philosophising she was able to "craft a cohesive, logical and defendable argument". Shreya concurred, and appreciated the impact of philosophy in terms of its being able to "formulate and debate ideas". Tom shared that engaging with philosophy enabled him to access the sociological perspectives that grounded his thesis argument. Taking the time to think about the propositions underpinning the work, seeking out deficiencies in logic, and validating and making clear assumptions all contribute to building a rigorous contribution to knowledge.

It Creates Belonging to an Academic Community

Doctoral candidates are emerging members of the academic community, and will become custodians of the intellectual life of their respective

disciplines (Park, 2005). Through engaging with thinking about thinking in the doctoral experience, candidates find that their confidence and capability to engage with, and contribute to, intellectual creativity and innovation are increased. In terms of confidence, Jane saw the results of philosophising in being "more confident engaging with scholarly debate". Savindya found that she was more confident when reading journal articles, and that she could be more critical of findings as "you can see the philosophical paradigm underpinning a study, and you can see where there is alignment between that paradigm and the study's method. Where the alignment is wrong, you can see how that results in a tenuous argument". Ingrid revealed that this ability to critique can also be turned on yourself, and you can end up "troubled by" the extent of a study's contribution. For Louise, philosophy gave her a voice in intellectual discourse, as it enabled her to explain and justify to readers her approach more effectively. Albert had a similar experience as his "use of logic and writing was greatly enhanced".

The Influence and Impact Beyond Doctoral Candidature

I See Myself Confidently Anew
Dewey's learning theories drew attention to the processual aspect of education, as learning can disrupt habitual thinking and understandings and challenge one's sense of identity (Bryan & Guccione, 2018; Fulton et al., 2012). For many students, philosophy triggers this disruption. There can be a realisation that answers to problems are not simple, and whilst this can be unsettling it can also spur a transformation, which results in greater confidence about one's place in the world. Savindya thought that there is a tendency to assume that philosophy is not required in some disciplines, but she saw challenging our perceptions of the world as invaluable. Despite feeling unsettled, as Albert reflected, "the philosophical component provided a great sense of freedom, even though long held beliefs were challenged". For Tom, philosophy was transformational, as "the process of doing the doctorate changed me so much that I find it difficult to think back to who I was before I started this journey". For Jane, it was less dramatic, but she saw benefit in reflecting on her thinking, as it "helped me [to] clarify my own beliefs" and resulted in a "greater understanding of myself".

I Empathise with the Lived Experience

In addition to personal transformation and refinement of identity, philosophy can benefit candidates by helping to make sense of (and to improve) their experience of humanity (Hoffmann et al., 2013). Many students are prompted to consider that their view of the world is narrow, and that it is critical to appreciate that we all, as Savindya put it, "think and perceive things differently". According to Albert, this improved "understanding of others and allowed me to engage at a more meaningful level". He described how this had increased his empathy for others. Tom described this benefit as a "light bulb" moment that was now pervasive in his life, as it "has altered my perspective of others, their decisions and behaviours and developed in me an acceptance of the other people's beliefs, even when they differ from my own long-held beliefs". Jane felt that engaging with philosophy results in a much deeper engagement with "life in general". This understanding of multiple perspectives helps candidates during and beyond their doctorates to appreciate their lived experience holistically, and to make sense of the behaviours of others—see for example, Efinger et al. (2004).

I Find It a Pleasurable Pursuit

For some candidates, thinking about your thinking evolves to be an indulgent pursuit. Notwithstanding that the wrestling with philosophy can be frustrating, when a new insight emerges there can be "feelings of wonderment, elation, and exhilaration" (Efinger et al., 2004, p. 741) that trigger a lifelong interest in philosophy. Tom, who was a retired candidate, commented that "I now have the uninterrupted time and the knowledge of philosophies to continue this intrinsically interesting activity", and he hoped that his writing will "embolden [others] to undertake the journeys of understanding their lives". The delights of philosophy were also appreciated by Albert, who coined the term the "gift of philosophy".

THE CHALLENGES OF PHILOSOPHISING

There is a strong case for wrestling with philosophy, but candidates do experience challenges. These include the impenetrability of philosophical writing, the need for support while wrestling with the texts and their ideas, the ability for thinking about your thinking to destabilise long-held beliefs and the reluctance of some to engage with philosophy.

Philosophical Texts Can Be Impenetrable and Seem Irrelevant

Initially, candidates often find philosophical texts difficult to understand and disconnected from the current day. It can seem like a "foreign language" that invokes fear and anxiety (Efinger et al., 2004, p. 741). Philosophical writing can also feel ambiguous and lacks the simplicity of more contemporary writing (Butts & Lundy, 2003), which offers solutions to the reader—rather than questions. For example, ontology and epistemology are daunting concepts for those new to research; as Savindya stated, "they are difficult to understand and explain". Philosophical texts can feel "impenetrable" and "dense" at times (Shreya). These difficulties, owing to the nature of the writing, are often confounded by the text being from a different era. Louise commented that "I find [that] some…of the philosophy feels really dated, but I suppose it was inevitable given past academic histories…privileged white men."

Philosophical Inquiry Can Require a Support Network

The need for support during candidature is well established, particularly surrounding the relationship between candidate and supervisor (Johansson & Yerrabati, 2017). Because philosophical texts can be dense and anxiety-provoking, candidates need support to continue wrestling with the concepts, even when it feels difficult or fruitless. Sometimes research supervisors are not well-equipped to support their candidates in exploring philosophy. Fernando said that scholars need more professional development in effective and efficient ways to support thinking about your thinking. Louise agreed with this sentiment, and suggested that research methods courses should be enhanced to introduce philosophy more effectively. Albert noted that not everyone is conscious of the need for philosophising, and he found this a "frustration". Louise also said that finding useful philosophical texts is difficult, and perhaps something with which a support network could help.

Philosophical Inquiry Can Be Destabilising or Provoke Anxiety

Thinking about your thinking can challenge fundamental assumptions and beliefs. While for some candidates this can be emancipatory, for others it can be destabilising or anxiety-provoking—particularly if the candidate lacks support to respond constructively to the process. Tom experienced a "lack of sleep" owing to the soul "searching" triggered by philosophising. Ingrid

found that she was "agonising about including deeply personal information that reveals personal information about myself that I didn't necessarily want to talk about but had to include in the thesis because it impacted on the study". Furthermore, in contrast to some candidates who had an increase in their self-confidence, Ingrid found that the more that she read "the less likely I became to confidently espouse one answer/argument and promote it".

Philosophical Inquiry Can Require a Shift in Mindset

Whilst some candidates experience a lack of support to engage with philosophy or find it destabilising, others find that their own mindsets can be a barrier to their ability even to engage with philosophy. For example, Savindya recognised her own "positivist tendencies" and that these "run deep", as she had had to challenge herself to think differently during her doctorate. Early in her candidature, Louise felt that philosophy was a "series of hurdles which kept stretching out", and she acknowledged that she saw it as "just something I have to do". For candidates whose mindset cannot see the potential benefits of this wrestling, their research may be hampered. Louise characterised herself as "not being a philosopher" and consequently, "there will be nuances I am avoiding."

The Rewards of Philosophising

Despite the challenges that some students encounter, there are numerous lessons learned from those candidates and supervisors who have come to appreciate the rich rewards of thinking about your thinking. To rely solely on the narratives of the candidates in this chapter, these can be summarised as reading widely, taking the time to engage in philosophical conversations, and making the time for both reading and talking.

Philosophising Is Aided by Reading Beyond the Texts Themselves

Thinking about your thinking is often triggered through reading various texts that propose ideas and concepts that challenge your assumptions about the world. Whilst there is significant benefit in reading source texts such as Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* or Heidegger's *Being and Time*, candidates benefit from looking for resources that make the concepts in these works more accessible. For example, Louise searched broadly for philosophical texts from diverse authorships. Savindya read secondary

texts or commentaries about philosophical works, and she had found that "other authors often explain the underlying concepts and paradigms in easier to understand language than the philosopher does, and I then have some [renewed] perspective when I go back and read the philosopher's original work". Savindya also read philosophical texts from disciplines outside her research area and found this to be beneficial. Tom's strategy was to use "internet blog sites", and to see "what others were saying on social media sites" about the concepts that he was encountering. He was grateful that others spend the time writing commentaries, which are more concise, yet provide elaboration of the important points. This complemented the inevitable "much reading" that is associated with engaging with philosophy.

Philosophising Is Aided by Dialogue and Contextualisation

For some candidates, thinking about thinking requires *talking* about thinking. This process of dialogue can occur with other research candidates, family and friends, and hopefully with the supervisory team. For Jane, a university-based early career research group was particularly beneficial, as "I bring questions to the group and we discuss our individual philosophical understandings in a respectful/safe and supportive environment". Both Savindya and Jane talked with friends and family about their philosophising. Candidates also reported the role of supervisors in supporting engagement with philosophy. Jane was often guided by her supervisory team on initial readings, and how to make sense of the articles. Tom engaged in conversations with his supervisors to make sense of the substantial reading that he had taken on. Albert reflected on the criticality of conversations on philosophy, as he found engaging with faculty through philosophical discourse to be "really meaningful". Both Louise and Savindya found that this process of dialogue assisted them to contextualise their reading and thinking to their study and life more broadly. To quote Savindya, these conversations were "helpful to allow me to frame the philosopher's work within my own research context".

Philosophising Is Aided by the Luxury of Time

Perhaps it goes without saying that reading and talking take time, which is a luxury not every candidate experiences. Shreya explained the time-consuming process of engaging with philosophy as follows: "So the aim is to unpick it slowly and deliberately, section by section". Savindya and Tom

both agreed that thinking about your thinking takes time. Jane captured the importance of time and commitment to wrestling with philosophy by indicating that it "requires effort". This need for time to engage fully with philosophy can be particularly challenging for candidates in an era where there are submission deadlines or grant milestones, and even for supervisory teams who may be limited in the time that they can spend engaged in thinking about thinking.

A "Lite" Derridean Deconstruction

We now complement the candidates' narratives with a lite Derridean deconstruction to contribute to the discourse on professional versus philosophical doctorates. This deconstruction reveals that, rather than being preoccupied by their differences, we can acknowledge the common root of doctorates: thaumázein moments, which should be preserved.

Simply put, Derrida (1968) noticed that much of Western thinking is founded on the logic of binaries, such as male-female, nature-nurture and black-white. But this logic, which suggests that binaries comprise two separate and distinct things, is fundamentally flawed as the two things share many commonalities. For example, black is defined in terms of its light absorbing qualities, and white in terms of its light-reflecting qualities, which means that they share more similarities than differences, and are an extension of each other. Derrida pointed out that one binary term (e.g., the professional doctorate) can become privileged over the other (e.g., the philosophical doctorate), and that there is a failure to realise that the new term (e.g., the professional doctorate) could not be conceived if not for its subordinated term (e.g., the philosophical doctorate). Therefore, the unprivileged side of a binary is the primary side, as it sets the conditions for what we are using the binary to express. Put another way, what we privilege and use frequently borrows its structure from that which we are criticising or neglecting to acknowledge.

This deconstructing Derridean lens can reveal something interesting about the modern expressions of "professional doctorate" and "philosophical doctorate". Gayatri Spivak (2013) extended Derrida's thinking on deconstruction and demonstrated that the distinctions made between First World and Third World people are not as distinct as we might think. In fact, the concept of the First World is built from Third World-ness concepts, which themselves are built from notions that we are trying to express about the concept of World-ness. If we apply this thinking to the

expressions of "professional doctorate" and "philosophical doctorate", we see that the former's structure is borrowed from the latter. Indeed, in the latter, the term "philosophical" also borrows its structure from what was meant by the Humboldtian doctorate, and the Humboldtian doctorate borrowed from philosophising that is driven by thaumázein (see Fig. 8.1).

Conclusion

From the narratives, philosophising appears to become possible and justifiable in the setting of a university and within the trammels of a doctoral programme. It is in this doctoral space that the conditions are set for philosophising to take place. Our candidate's narratives reveal the influence that philosophising had had on their research (developing logical arguments, enhancing their research skills, creating a sense of belonging) and about the challenges that it presented (felt destabilising and required a sense of faith that it would bear fruit), they also spoke—perhaps more so—about the transformational rewards that they gleaned from philosophising, and the broader impacts that it has on their lives, as they felt a "greater understanding of myself" (Jane), and they hoped that their experiences would "embolden [others] to undertake the journeys of understanding their lives" (Tom), as philosophy, and by extension philosophising, is a "gift" (Albert). Coupling this with our mode of Derridean "lite" deconstruction, we believe that the "Ph" in the philosophical doctorate refers to the "thaumázein" moments that are possible in a doctoral experience. Given that the professional doctorate borrows its structure from the philosophical doctorate, all doctorates can still contain "thaumázein" moments.

References

Arendt, H. (2019). *The human condition* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Aristotle. (2009). *The politics* (E. Barker, Trans.; R. F. Stalley, Ed.). Oxford University Press.

Aristotle. (2018). *Metaphysics (translated by W. D. Ross with an Introduction by Ed Johnson)* (W. D. Ross, Trans.). Neeland Media.

Barnacle, R. (2005). Research education ontologies: Exploring doctoral becoming. *Higher Education Research & Development, 24*(2), 179–188. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360500062995

Bracken, S. (2010). Discussing the importance of ontology and epistemology Awareness in practitioner research. *Worcester Journal of Learning and Teaching, 4.* https://rteworcester.wordpress.com/resources/worcester-journal-of-learning-teaching-archived-issues/#4

Bryan, B., & Guccione, K. (2018). Was it worth it? A qualitative exploration into graduate perceptions of doctoral value. *Higher Education Research & Development, 37*(6), 1124–1140. https://doi.org/10.1080/0729436 0.2018.1479378

Butts, J. B., & Lundy, K. S. (2003). Teaching philosophy of science in nursing doctoral education. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship, 35*(1), 87–91. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1547-5069.2003.00087.x

Derrida, J. (1968). La differance. *Bulletin Société Française de Philosophie, 62*(3), 73–101.

Edwards, S. (2008). A professional practice-based doctorate: Developing advanced nursing practice (guest editorial). *Nurse Education Today, 29*(1), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2008.11.006

Efinger, J., Maldonado, N., & McArdle, G. (2004). PhD students['] perceptions of the relationship between philosophy and research: A qualitative investigation. *The Qualitative Report, 9*(4), 732–759. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2004.1911

Fulton, J., Kuit, J., Sanders, G., & Smith, P. (2012). The role of the Professional Doctorate in developing professional practice. *Journal of Nursing Management, 20*(1), 130–139. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2834.2011.01345.x

Hoffmann, M., Schmidt, J., & Nersessian, N. (2013). Philosophy of and as interdisciplinarity. *Synthese: An International Journal for Epistemology, Methodology and Philosophy of. Science, 190*(11), 1857–1864. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-012-0214-8

Holbrook, A., Bourke, S., Fairbairn, H., & Lovat, T. (2014). The focus and substance of formative comment provided by PhD examiners. *Studies in Higher Education, 39*(6), 983–1000. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2012.750289

Janack, M. (2017). Covering the basics in the philosophy of science. *Metascience, 26*, 233–235. https://doi-org.ezproxy.usq.edu.au/10.1007/s11016-017-0203-0

Johansson, C., & Yerrabati, S. (2017). A review of the literature on professional doctorate supervisory styles. *Management in Education, 31*(4), 166–171. https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020617734821

Jones, M. (2018). Contemporary trends in professional doctorates. *Studies in Higher Education, 43*(5), 814–825. https://doi.org/10.1080/0307507 9.2018.1438095

Josephson, P., Karlsohn, T., & Östling, J. (2014). *The Humboldtian tradition: Origins and legacies.* Brill. https://books.google.com.au/books?id=jwcSBQAAQBAJ

Oftedal, G. (2014). The role of philosophy of science in Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI): The case of nanomedicine. *Life Sciences, Society and Policy, 10*(1), article 5. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40504-014-0005-8

Park, C. (2005). New variant PhD: The changing nature of the doctorate in the UK. *Journal of Higher Education Policy & Management, 27*(2), 189–207. https://doi.org/10.1080/13600800500120068

Park, C. (2007). *Redefining the doctorate*. The Higher Education Academy. https://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/id/eprint/435/1/RedefiningTheDoctorate.pdf

Plato. (2014). *Theaetetus* (J. McDowell, Trans.; L. Brown, Ed.). Oxford University Press.

Pring, R. (2012). Importance of philosophy in the conduct of educational research. *Journal of International and Comparative Education, 1*(1), 23–30. https://doi.org/10.14425/00.36.38

Probst, C., & Lepori, B. (2008). What is a doctorate? Changing meanings and practices in communication sciences in Switzerland. *European Journal of Education., 43*(4), 47–494. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1465-3435.2008.00368.x

Spivak, G. (2013). *The Spivak reader: Selected works of Gayati Chakravorty Spivak* (D. Landry & G. MacLean, Eds.). Taylor & Francis.

Taylor, S. E. (2012). Changes in doctoral education. *International Journal for Researcher Development, 3*(2), 118–138. https://doi.org/10.1108/17597511311316973

Wellington, J. (2013). Searching for "doctorateness". *Studies in Higher Education, 38*(10), 1490–1503. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.634901

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly
of Completing a Thesis by Publication

Belinda Cash

Introduction

Higher degree by research candidates are under increasing pressure from higher education institutions to publish from their research during candidature (Lee & Kamler, 2008). In some cases, this expectation is separated from completion of the thesis itself, although growing numbers of candidates complete their candidature using the format of a "thesis by publication" or "thesis including publications".

Thesis by publication options have been available in different forms since the mid-1960s; however, the rapid growth in their uptake has been linked to institutional pressures to increase research productivity (Jackson, 2013). The "publish or perish" aphorism has become more pertinent in Australia recently, with cuts to higher education increasing university sector reliance on income derived from competitive external funding and research outputs (Jackson, 2013; Mason & Merga, 2018a). As a result,

B. Cash (✉)
School of Social Work and Arts, Charles Sturt University, Albury, NSW, Australia
e-mail: bcash@csu.edu.au

research outputs are used both as an indicator of research excellence at the university level and also as a measure of individual success, with direct impacts on academic selection and promotion, research funding and professional development opportunities (Dinham & Scott, 2001; Mason & Merga, 2018a). The thesis by publication is therefore often encouraged as an alternative to a traditional doctoral thesis, as it affords candidates the opportunity to build a track record of publications and subsequently increases their employment potential post-completion (Gould, 2016; Jackson, 2013).

While advocates for thesis by publication approaches maintain that publishing during candidature better equips candidates for academic life, others contend that pressure to focus on publications can reduce the exploratory nature of doctoral studies, denying candidates the opportunity to engage in creative and independent thinking as they shape their research path (Gould, 2016). These concerns are not alleviated by the lack of clarity about the requirements for completing a thesis by publication, with vagueness and inconsistency of university guidelines recognised as being problematic for candidates choosing this approach to completing their doctorates (Nethsinghe & Southcott, 2015).

Throughout this chapter, the term "thesis by publication" is used as a blanket term to capture the various forms that this approach to thesis writing can take. Drawing on the author's personal experience of completing a thesis by publication in an Australian university, this chapter explores the benefits and challenges of this approach to completing a doctoral thesis.

From Clinical Practice to Parenting and a PhD

My entry into academia began in an unexpected and unplanned way. My career began with an undergraduate degree, followed by ten years of associated practice experience. During this time, I completed a clinically focused coursework master's degree that included a minor research project and thesis. I enjoyed the workplace-based research project undertaken as part of my master's degree, and I had been fortunate to see direct organisational change as a result of it. An associated conference presentation and publication gave me an encouraging, if somewhat naïve, insight into the potential power of research as a tool for change.

The end of my master's degree coincided with the birth of my twins, and the subsequent resignation from my role as a clinical mental health specialist. As my babies turned into toddlers and the potential for brain

power returned, I received a call from a local university offering me casual teaching work. The lure of seemingly well-paid and flexible work around my new parenting commitments coaxed me back into the workforce from maternity leave. It quickly became apparent, however, that, to progress in academia, a PhD was going to be a necessary next step. With young children in tow, I decided to embark on the PhD adventure, to give me "more flexibility and less stress than juggling clinical work"—yes, go ahead and laugh at that optimism and naïvety.

It would seem that I am not alone, however, in embarking on a PhD at a stage of life often characterised by work, family and other commitments. In 2017, individuals over the age of 30 represented more than 65% of Australian higher degree by research students (Department of Education, 2019). The commencement of academic careers during their 30s has been identified as causing concurrent biological and tenure track clocks to start ticking for women (Hirakata & Daniluk, 2009).

Balancing parenting with postgraduate studies was a particularly challenging aspect of my doctoral experience. It was difficult to combine the high-level concentration required to work on the PhD with any kind of concurrent quality parenting, so I tried to keep the time focused on these two roles apart as much as was possible. While somewhat helpful, this strategy often resulted in guilt-ridden feelings about not being a good enough parent when I focused on my research and writing, or not being a good enough student when I took time off to focus on my family. It became even harder to distinguish and separate these domains when I became a single parent and returned to full-time work mid-way through the doctoral journey.

It took quite a while for me to compartmentalise my life in effective ways to navigate the dual roles of parent and PhD candidate without sacrificing too much sleep and sanity. I found participating in workshops with Hugh Kearns (https://www.ithinkwell.com.au/) and Inger Mewburn (https://thesiswhisperer.com/) really helpful in picking up hints and tricks to improve my productivity and planning skills. These sessions helped me to prioritise my PhD work in my most productive hours, which for me meant working on research and writing earlier in the day and doing "busy" jobs like email later in the evenings. I also started scheduling in lots of *Shut Up and Write* sessions through my institution, to dedicate guilt-free writing times to my research during the day when I was most productive. I never quite mastered fitting both work and study into a standard workday, so my PhD parenting years frequently involved working full

days, parenting throughout the afternoon and early evening, then returning to work or study once the children were in bed.

Hardy et al. (2018) explored the experience of academic parenting, demonstrating how different disciplines, levels of seniority and age of children can all impact on the experience and trajectory of parents in academia. My experiences of academic parenting have evolved and changed as my kids have grown and as I have become more settled into the academic world. In the early days of the PhD, the advantages of full day care options were counterbalanced by my limited ability to travel away from home for things like conferences and data collection. As they became less dependent, a new range of challenges arrived with reduced work hours as we navigated the shorter school days. For academic parents with older children, these challenges can also be compounded when adolescents become ineligible for after-school programmes (Hardy et al., 2018).

Planning a Thesis by Publication

When I was engaging in initial conversations about enrolling in a PhD programme, it was clear that both the institution and my academic supervisors preferred that I pursue a thesis by publication. Knowledge translation had been a key pull into research for me, so the idea of sharing my findings through publications seemed an obvious choice. My research proposal and my PhD were subsequently planned with this in mind, utilising a multiple methods project design so that I would have data to write up along the way. This commitment to the publication pathway from the outset really made a difference in the long run for the PhD. Although there were changes and things that did not remain exactly the same as initially envisaged, planning for a series of publications that would create data and be publishable in chunks became a key to success using this method. Without this, I suspect that there would have been significantly more difficulty in completing the exegesis that ultimately pulled together the thesis into a cohesive document.

The requirements surrounding what constitutes a thesis by publication can vary considerably across institutions. There are also often unclear requirements about the number of papers that are required, and also about their required status as published, accepted or simply prepared for publication, as well as differing expectations for the exegesis that will frame these publications (Mason & Merga, 2018b). It is important to become familiar with any guidelines that might exist in your organisation around thesis by

publication expectations, and to keep an eye out for changes to these requirements during your candidature. It can also be helpful to ask your supervisors to share previous student theses, as well as searching thesis repositories in your field for good examples of completed doctorates by publication. These strategies will help to guide your planning and to provide a feel for what a good thesis by publication looks like in your field.

As a social worker, I am interested in understanding and addressing issues in relation to the social systems that surround them. This perspective informed the development of my PhD topic and publication plan, as it provided a stepped approach to the collection and analysis of data relating to different systems surrounding informal caregivers. My project started at the macro level of understanding broader sociocultural and policy contexts of informal care, which resulted in a policy analysis paper. I then explored the translation of these policies into practice by completing a series of focus groups with health professionals, which became my second paper. I then delved into the individual experience of providing care and receiving supports, the focus of my third paper. Each of these stages was designed to hone the focus of my research, allowing the findings and publications from each stage to inform the next. It also meant that there was a clear and planned way forward to integrate these papers into a cohesive thesis, as each stage was clearly linked to my broader research questions and my overall research goals. The fourth and final paper set out this innovative way of approaching a thesis by publication, which you can read more about in Cash et al. (2019).

The Publication Rollercoaster

The nature of a doctorate necessitates a lot of thinking, reading and planning time in the early months, often much of the first year of candidature. Unless you are completing a doctorate in a pre-determined project with clear parameters and groundwork established, this is a crucial step in setting up the foundations of a study that will make an "original contribution" to knowledge in your field. Although this is a crucial stage of doctoral development, it can result in there being very little actually to write about for publication during that first year. Similar observations were made by Nethsinghe and Southcott (2015), who reflected on their experience of journals not usually accepting articles that do not contain original data from a novice writer.

For me, this meant that I was 18 months into my candidature, and halfway through my scholarship, before I had completed my first study and had sufficient data to develop a paper for publication. Fortunately, I had an early win and this paper was accepted on the first submission with very minor revisions. Although this was a thrilling confidence boost, it gave me a somewhat rose-coloured view of the pathway ahead. The second paper required a more time-consuming process of review, although one I felt was ultimately fair and useful to the overall paper, my thinking and the thesis. It was at the third paper stage that the challenges inherent in publication processes became more problematic. The first journal to which I submitted took nine months to review it, before rejecting it with minimal feedback. The challenge of extended review times for journal publication has been highlighted previously as creating potentially untenable delays for a candidate attempting to complete a thesis by publication (Knight & Steinbach, 2008; Nethsinghe & Southcott, 2015). Two more re-writes and rejections followed with other journals on this third paper, by which time my scholarship had expired and I was forced back into the full-time workforce. The thesis took a significant step backwards and moved further down my priority list as the demands of a full-time academic position took hold.

The paper was eventually published in an excellent journal, though one with half the word limit of the original manuscript. Although the paper was published, the significant cutting and rewriting markedly changed the scope of what was ultimately published from that stage of the project. This challenge was explored by Mason and Merga (2018b), who pointed out that publications can potentially limit the required scope of a PhD, as a thesis usually follows a different structure and rules from those of academic journals. Although this was not necessary in this example, the process did create a lot of anxiety about the risks of relying on publications to complete a thesis and the potential need to adapt sections of the thesis to a more traditional format if publication plans are unsuccessful.

The final paper planned for my thesis was written as a methods paper. This was designed dually to showcase the innovative approach that I had taken to my project and to form the bulk of my methodology chapter in the thesis. I wrote the paper and submitted it, only for it to bounce back with significant changes requested. Four rounds of major review later (no, I am not kidding…), the paper looked nothing at all like I had intended. The time-consuming systematic review that I had conducted especially for the article was scrapped completely, and the reviewers requested so many

examples of findings that the paper could no longer be located in the methodology chapter because it revealed too many findings before they would be presented in the thesis. This ultimately then left me with no methods chapter and a published but homeless paper. Finding a home for this manuscript caused significant disruption to the thesis and risked repetition of content from both the new methods chapter and the three other published papers. Significant thesis whispering was required to get around this final paper, although it ultimately found a home and made a significant contribution to the overall thesis.

Reflecting now on those review processes, I recognise that I developed strategies and skills that continue to inform my academic writing and practices. Reviewer questions seeking clarification of terms reinforced important lessons about using accessible writing rather than discipline-specific jargon. Some of the more difficult aspects of the reviewer's suggestions were requests to expand on ideas or concepts within the paper. While these were sometimes able to be accommodated and helped to refine and clarify key aspects of the paper, on other occasions these requests posed significant challenges to the available scope and word limits.

A strategy that I utilised when responding to journal reviewers was to break down reviewer feedback into individual comments within a table, with a corresponding column to provide responses to each individual point. An example section from one of my responses to reviewers is provided in Table 9.1. This process helped me as a new researcher to ensure that I was carefully considering and responding to each reviewer comment. This process also provided the reviewers and editors with a transparent way to see how and where I had completed the requested amendments and/or provided a clear rationale for why particular changes were not made.

Issues of Time

A common challenge for all doctoral candidates are issues relating to time, particularly for candidates on a scholarship. I was awarded a three-year scholarship to complete my PhD under a faculty scheme that offered a 0.2 equivalent full-time (EFT) teaching contract as a supplement to the stipend. This was designed to provide enough extra income to stay off the poverty line while providing teaching experience towards the end goal of becoming a teaching/research academic. This combination provided a range of interesting academic asides to my research, although it feels

Table 9.1   Extract from a response to reviewers

No.	Reviewer one comments	Author response
1	Introduction, paragraph 2. It would be helpful to outline some of the "adverse effects" and "negative impacts" of providing care.	Further detail about these negative impacts has been provided. These changes are reflected in blue text in paragraph 2 of the introduction.
2	Page 3, paragraph 3. Please clarify what is meant by the risk of "relationship type for spousal caregivers". Is this suggesting that spousal caregivers are at greater risk than adult-child caregivers?	Yes, the studies being referred to found increased risks to spousal caregivers because of their age and co-residence. This sentence has now been rewritten to clarify this point better. The changes are reflected in purple text.
3	Results. In a few places, reference is made to subsets of the sample, for example, "one group of caregivers" (page 6, line 28), "several interviews" (page 8, line 38). It would be helpful to provide an indication of how large these subsets of participants were.	Thank you for this feedback. These descriptions of subsets have been revisited throughout the results section and amended to reflect better the proportion of caregivers being referred to. These changes are reflected in grey text throughout the findings and discussion (pages 5–9).

important to acknowledge the often-time-consuming nature of teaching preparation and marking periods that distracted from PhD progress at different points. These competing demands and the need for sound time management skills are likely to be shared by all candidates juggling any type of other work commitments outside the doctorate.

As highlighted above, issues of time can also be particularly pertinent when engaging in academic publishing processes. This challenge was discussed by Gould (2016), who pointed out that a thesis by publication depends on a range of things outside the candidate's control, such as the doctorate generating enough complete studies for publication and experiencing a reasonably timely peer review process. The unpredictable nature of review time frames can require both resilience and flexibility. Thesis progress and time management can be affected when the need arises to shift focus from planned work in order to respond to revisions that are often required according to publisher-dictated timeframes.

Carefully considering whether it will be possible to complete the project and publications within the parameters of a time-limited scholarship, and identifying contingency plans such as the availability of scholarship extensions, are useful to explore upfront. Time can also work in favour of

some candidates, such as part-time students who might be more flexible around other commitments and more able to accommodate delays in publication.

Writing, Co-authoring and Navigating Reviewers

Unlike a traditional approach to doctoral thesis writing, the experience of completing a doctorate with publications requires a continuous process of skill development to adapt academic writing to meet the diverse requirements of multiple target audiences, journal guidelines and referencing styles. Writing for publication also involves a complex range of skills not only in the writing itself but also in the selection of appropriate journals for publication and responding to both positive and negative feedback from reviewers. This process often relies on good advice and the experience of others to provide insights into the performance of journals in your field, although it has been noted that the process of supervision often does not sufficiently facilitate the development of these required skills (Mason & Merga, 2018a). It can also be difficult to determine how many papers should be included in the thesis, with expectations varying greatly across disciplines. Research by Mason and Merga (2018a) showed an average of 4.5 papers in a humanities and social sciences thesis by publication, although their sample captured examples ranging between 1 and 12 papers that were categorised as a thesis by publication.

Embedded in writing for multiple audiences and purposes is the added complexity of meeting expectations in addition to those of your doctoral thesis examiners. Examiners are usually experts in your field who are working with pre-determined marking criteria, so it could be argued that the expectations of examiners should be somewhat predictable. It can be much more complex, however, to pre-empt the expectations of anonymous reviewers and journal editors. Peer review is designed to increase academic rigour and to maintain quality in the publication processes, so it can be a valuable opportunity to receive feedback that strengthens and clarifies your work. An unfortunate by-product of this method, however, is that a blind review process does not contextualise you or your work. Although reviewers are usually well meaning, they almost certainly do not know about your broader doctoral project or the intended role of this particular manuscript in your meticulously planned thesis. As discussed above, this can lead to the dilemma of agreeing to manuscript changes in order to get your work published at the cost of impacts on the wider thesis.

It is also common within a thesis by publication for candidates to publish with their supervisors as co-authors, although, as pointed out by Jackson (2013), this expectation is often not clear, consistent or explicit in guidelines. Rather than remaining an unwritten assumption that papers will be co-authored, it is important to have a conversation early in the doctoral process, long before a paper is drafted. Useful points to consider can include exploring what exactly will constitute contributions to papers, how these contributions will be reflected in your thesis and whether all members of the supervisory team will contribute to authorship. There are many potential hazards in the co-authoring process, and there is little clarity or direction available to help to navigate these hazards. Co-authoring is an experience that can vary greatly, and how co-authorship with your supervisory team will proceed is an important and necessary conversation for all candidates completing a thesis by publication.

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

There are a number of advantages of completing a thesis by publication. The opportunity to write manuscripts for publication and to navigate publication processes generates incredibly useful skills for candidates seeking a future career in academia. Studies have highlighted that researchers who begin publishing during their candidature tend to have greater research productivity throughout their careers (Horta & Santos, 2015). Mason and Merga (2018a) also pointed out the greater transferability of academic journal writing over traditional thesis writing, as well as the benefits of disseminating findings in a timely manner and receiving valuable feedback through peer review in the process. These benefits also result in the significant advantage of graduating with an established publication record. I really valued completing my doctorate with the bulk of my thesis work already published. It made a huge difference to complete my degree and immediately to move on to other new projects without the need to publish and disseminate my research still hanging over my head. It certainly helped my CV and my academic career.

Despite these great wins, the PhD came at a significant personal toll. It is difficult to disentangle how much of this was contributed to by the struggles with publishing, as my only experience completing a traditional thesis was on a considerably smaller scale than a doctorate. It was often a struggle to navigate the challenges of working, raising a family and trying to fit in publication processes and the thesis. The unpredictable timelines

and expectations of reviewers and publishers caused disruption to my plans and workload at times that were often really inconvenient. I was frequently left feeling guilty about the amount of time spent during evenings and weekends away from my family in order to keep things rolling along, and there were times that it all felt quite overwhelming. But I did succeed, eventually. An upside was that, with my publications having already undergone such extensive peer review, my examination process felt comparatively quick and painless. This was a huge relief after the challenges that had preceded that final frontier.

These personal reflections are perhaps unsurprising given that completing a doctoral programme is widely accepted as a particularly challenging academic endeavour. Research consistently demonstrates higher than usual rates of stress, isolation and poor mental health outcomes for higher degree by research candidates, who have significantly higher rates of anxiety and depression when compared to both general populations and other educated populations (Barry et al., 2018; Evans et al., 2018; Levecque et al., 2017). This phenomenon has been attributed to factors such as high workload demands, poor work–life balance, financial and career instability, and an increasing pressure to secure external research funding and to publish in high-impact journals (Barry et al., 2018; Levecque et al., 2017).

Beyond the completion of publications, it is necessary in Australia to present published papers as part of a single cohesive and critical piece of work, which can be difficult when each publication has its own audience and aims (Jackson, 2013; Merga, 2015). Challenges can arise ensuring consistency across the thesis and also reducing the potential for repetition (Mason & Merga, 2018b). A doctorate by publication is also more common in, and arguably better suited to, some fields of study than others. A study by Mason and Merga (2018b) found that the doctorate by publication format tends to be much less common in HSS fields than it is in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and medical fields. They identified that the broad research enquiries of HSS topics tend to produce less clear and concise answers to research problems, which can present challenges in compartmentalising research into smaller publishable pieces (Mason & Merga, 2018b).

Strategies for Success

There were many people who and strategies that supported my journey to completing a doctorate by publication. The following is a list of my top strategies for doctoral success!

- **Plan for publications from the very beginning.**
  - If you are planning to complete a doctorate by publication, it is essential that you set your project up in a way that there will be something to write about and submit for publication throughout the journey.
- **Get help with your academic writing and research skills.**
  - Universities have wonderful teams of academic skills support and library staff to support staff and students. These services can be incredibly helpful, so finding out who these people are in your institution early in your candidature can be an important way to develop academic, writing and research skills.
- **Look out for training and support to help with planning and productivity.**
  - Universities often run training sessions to help students learn all kinds of useful skills and strategies, from using timesaving software to planning and managing research projects. Keep an eye out for opportunities to develop skills and practices that will help to make your doctoral journey as easy as possible.
  - Online options include Hugh Kearns' free productivity resources available at https://www.ithinkwell.com.au/, and the writing resources and the doctoral advice provided by Professor Inger Mewburn at https://thesiswhisperer.com/
- **Develop a self-care plan … and use it!**
  - A doctorate is a long and complex journey, so there will be inevitable ups and downs in your personal, work and research life along the way. Be aware of your own individual early warning signs for stress, and have strategies to help ensure that your physical and mental health and well-being are sustainable for the long haul.
- **Find the balance that is right for you.**
  - A doctorate doesn't have to occur during a typical 9–5 day, so find your productive times and protect them fiercely. Use the flexibility to your productive advantage and to help to navigate the work–life combination that works for you.

- **Connect with other research students.**
    - Other students understand the crazy journey that is a doctorate. Family and friends outside academia will often not really understand exactly what you are experiencing, so it is a great idea to connect with other doctoral candidates.
    - For motivation and accountability, check out *Shut Up and Write* sessions and writing groups. These are often found within institutions (check with your research services department), but they are increasingly available online. Writing groups can be about having a shared and focused space to write in the company of others, or they can provide platforms to share and discuss your writing, with options to receive peer feedback.
    - There are lots of great professional associations and discipline/field-specific supports that and who will have varying levels of support and opportunities to engage with fellow students and researchers.
    - Social media now provides lots of opportunities to find groups online to suit your specific needs and interests, from situation specific (e.g., academic parenting) to informal conversations and connection (e.g., #PhDchat and #ECRchat).

Conclusion

As explored through this reflective chapter, there are a number of complexities inherent in progressing through and completing a doctorate by publication. The need for highly developed and flexible writing skills, and the necessity to navigate co-authorship with doctoral supervisors, can add pressure to the process of writing a thesis. The contributions of blind reviewers, editors and publishing time frames can (and do) also impact significantly on progress through candidature.

The thesis by publication also requires significant resilience, owing to the complexities of receiving and responding to peer reviews and navigating an environment characterised by high rejection rates. If your end goal is not about working in academia, then publications may not be your primary consideration. If this is the case, the opportunity to focus on the more transferrable skills of the doctoral experience might be a more productive way to approach candidature. If you are not deterred by these potential challenges, however, the thesis by publication offers an approach to the doctorate that disseminates your research in a timely way and means that you will graduate with a publication record and valuable real-world writing skills.

References

Barry, K. M., Woods, M., Warnecke, E., Stirling, C., & Martin, A. (2018). Psychological health of doctoral candidates, study-related challenges and perceived performance. *Higher Education Research & Development, 37*(3), 468–483. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2018.1425979

Cash, B., Hodgkin, S., & Warburton, J. (2019). A transformative approach to systems theory in caregiving research. *Qualitative Social Work, 18*(4), 710–726. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325017749988

Department of Education. (2019). Equity in higher degrees by research. *Australian Government Statistical Report.* https://www.dese.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/student-equity-higher-degrees-research

Dinham, S., & Scott, C. (2001). The experience of disseminating the results of doctoral research. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 25*(1), 45–55. https://doi.org/10.1080/03098770020030498

Evans, T. M., Bira, L., Gastelum, J. B., Weiss, L. T., & Vanderford, N. L. (2018). Evidence for a mental health crisis in graduate education. *Nature Biotechnology, 36*(3), 282–284. http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.csu.edu.au/10.1038/nbt.4089

Gould, J. (2016). Future of the thesis. *Nature, 535*(7), 26–28. https://doi.org/10.1038/535026a

Hardy, A., McDonald, J., Guijt, R., Leane, E., Martin, A., James, A., Jones, M., Corban, M., & Green, B. (2018). Academic parenting: Work–family conflict and strategies across child age, disciplines and career level. *Studies in Higher Education, 43*(4), 625–643. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2016.1185777

Hirakata, P., & Daniluk, J. (2009). Swimming upstream: The experience of academic mothers of young children. *Canadian Journal of Counselling, 43*(4), 283–294. https://cjc-rcc.ucalgary.ca/article/view/58884

Horta, H., & Santos, J. M. (2015). The impact of publishing during PhD studies on career research publication, visibility, and collaborations. *Research in Higher Education, 57*, 28–50. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-015-9380-0

Jackson, D. (2013). Completing a PhD by publication: A review of Australian policy and implications for practice. *Higher Education Research & Development, 32*(3), 355–368. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2012.692666

Knight, L. V., & Steinbach, T. A. (2008). Selecting an appropriate publication outlet: A comprehensive model of journal selection criteria for researchers in a broad range of academic disciplines. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 3*, 59–79. http://www.ijds.org/Volume3/IJDSv3p059-079Knight84.pdf

Lee, A., & Kamler, B. (2008). Bringing pedagogy to doctoral publishing. *Teaching in Higher Education, 13*(5), 511–523. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510802334723

Levecque, K., Anseel, F., De Beuckelaer, A., Ven Der Heyden, J., & Gisle, L. (2017). Work organisation and mental health problems in PhD students. *Research Policy, 46*(4), 868–879. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2017.02.008

Mason, S., & Merga, M. K. (2018a). A current view of the thesis by publication in the humanities and social sciences. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 13*, 139–154. https://doi.org/10.28945/3983

Mason, S., & Merga, M. K. (2018b). Integrating publications in the social science doctoral thesis by publication. *Higher Education Research & Development, 37*(7), 1454–1471. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2018.1498461

Merga, M. K. (2015). Thesis by publication in education: An autoethnographic perspective for educational researchers. *Issues in Educational Research, 25*(2), 291–308. http://www.iier.org.au/iier25/merga.pdf

Nethsinghe, R., & Southcott, J. (2015). A juggling act: Supervisor/candidate partnership in a doctoral thesis by publication. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 10*, 167–185. http://ijds.org/Volume10/IJDSv10p167-185Nethsinghe0877.pdf

Incorporating Agile Principles in Completing and Supervising a Thesis by Publication

Anup Shrestha

Introduction

Since the early nineteenth century, the Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) has been offered as a degree of the highest academic honour that a student can achieve in any field. Since its inception, attaining a PhD degree often requires the traditional model of completing a sequence of research training coursework, followed by the successful defence of a long piece of academic writing—that is, the *dissertation*. The dissertation, or thesis, is typically characterised as a very complex and detailed written work that demonstrates an original contribution to new knowledge based on original research. PhD candidates focus on the all-encompassing ambition of producing the decisive manuscript from their long research journey—the "dissertation". This document is the zenith of all their work combined. This traditional format of writing up a long dissertation for a PhD is challenging on two fronts: student experience; and research impact.

A. Shrestha (✉)
University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, QLD, Australia
e-mail: anup.shrestha@usq.edu.au

The Dual Challenges of the Traditional PhD: Student Experience and Research Impact

In terms of student experience, the journey to complete the dissertation towards one's PhD degree is an arduous process. The average length of a dissertation across all disciplines ranges from 90,000 to 150,000 words, and it is even longer for qualitative/creative dissertations. When one embarks on writing a single academic document of such a length for the first (and most likely the only) time in one's life, the challenges of a PhD degree are compounded. This is an additional impediment to new PhD recruits, who may also be starting to learn from their research methods training, exploring literature to choose a research topic and navigating through the ever-changing scope of the research work. Unsurprisingly, the PhD programme attrition is alarmingly high; for example, attrition rates in the USA across all disciplines range between 36 and 51% (Young et al., 2019), and, in the USA and Canada combined, 40% to 50% of doctoral candidates were estimated as never finishing their degrees (Litalien, 2015), while in Australia "The percentage of students who completed their PhD after four or fewer years has even fallen from 25 per cent in 2005 and 2010 to 23 per cent in 2017" (Torka, 2020, p. 72). Relatedly, PhDs have been perceived less like a journey towards the quest of novel knowledge and more like an endurance test where students have a long, isolating and frustrating experience. The latest survey of over 6000 PhD graduates published in *Nature* (Woolston, 2019) highlighted that over 35% of respondents sought help for anxiety and depression caused by their PhD studies.

With regard to research impact, PhD degrees across the world have come under intense scrutiny, with concerns that, while numbers of PhD graduates are growing, the quality and impact of what a PhD degree can deliver have degraded (Cyranoski et al., 2011). These concerns are not new: in 1968, *Nature* published an article entitled "Is a PhD worth having?" (Author unacknowledged, 1968). More recently, *The Economist* article boldly declared that a PhD is often a waste of time (Author unacknowledged, 2010). Traditionally, a PhD degree is developed for a career in university research; however, more recently, PhD graduates now go on to build careers outside universities. In fact, non-academic jobs constitute up to 50% of post-PhD careers in social sciences, and arguably offer higher salaries, better job security and more opportunities to develop further skills (Purcell et al., 2006). A recent study flagged that increasingly PhD graduates look for non-academic employment, and that research into

insights on how students could expand their career choices for success outside universities is warranted (Chen, 2021). In such an environment, even university scholars have started to question the worth of a single dissertation document (Russell-Pinson & Harris, 2019).

An Alternative Pathway: PhD by Publication

In response to the calls for enriching PhD study experience and for improving PhD research impact, universities have started to offer an alternative pathway to PhD—PhD by publication—whereby candidates complete their research degree by submitting their transitional research works intermittently. In this option, candidates attempt to publish academic papers in peer-reviewed journals during their PhD journey, which are often then logically collated into a single thesis manuscript at the end. An accepted format of PhD by publication is a compilation of two to four journal articles (accepted for publication or intended to be published) that are interwoven between an initial introduction chapter and the conclusion chapter of the thesis. Publishing papers in high-quality journal outlets is a significant academic endeavour. There is increasing expectation in the academic career market for PhD students to publish papers during their candidature. In the traditional model, students may start to decouple their dissertation document to produce one or two academic papers post-conferral of their doctoral degrees. On the other hand, PhD by publication is characterised by the division of tasks into short phases of work and by the frequent adaptation of plans—that is, the "agile" way of doctoral studies. Figure 10.1 illustrates one of the many workflows for the PhD by publication journey in comparison with the traditional PhD pathway.

Figure 10.1 demonstrates that, while the research process may be similar—that is, a widely accepted iterative process of topic selection, literature review, data collection, findings and discussions—the drafting process changes the dynamics of the PhD pathway. The traditional PhD process directs students to keep compiling the logical drafts of their research iterations, which are potentially publishable as independent research articles, as future chapters or sub-sections of their massive dissertation document. This often results in the final compilation of the dissertation as an arduous task that demands extreme knowledge-intensive integration tasks (Russell-Pinson & Harris, 2019). By contrast, the PhD by publication, as illustrated in Fig. 10.1, can potentially demonstrate timely contributions to the body of knowledge during one's PhD journey. In this context, the
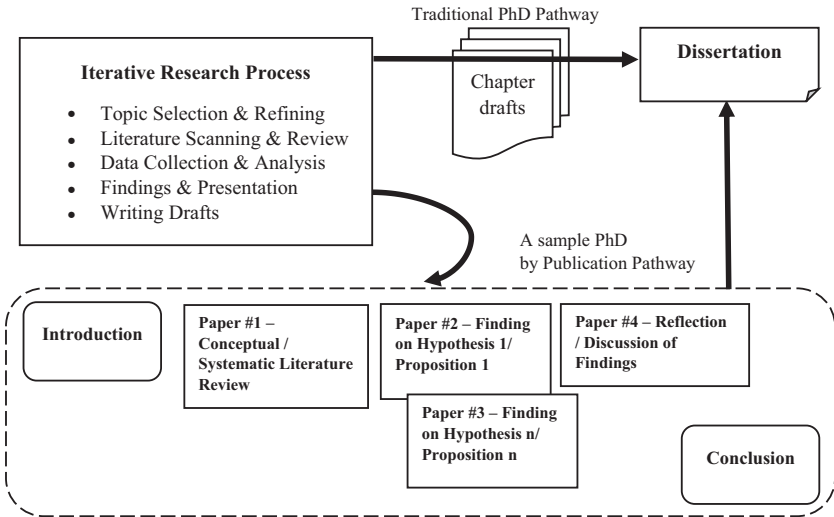
Fig. 10.1 Traditional thesis versus thesis by publication pathway from iterative research process

decoupling of the drafting process is in essence the core of agile principles. While this process appears to be a logical structure to embark on a PhD journey and has been empirically proven to promote academic careers and motivation to study (Merga et al., 2020), such a drastic change of mindset can be challenging in terms of support offered by supervisors as well as by the university to the PhD student. Maintaining the cohesiveness of the central thesis in an array of published articles so that it tells a compelling story about the student's research journey and findings is one of the critical challenges. The following section demonstrates how agile principles can be adopted to realise the benefits and to mitigate the challenges to future PhD students who are completing their thesis by publication.

Adopting Agile Principles Towards a PhD by Publication

The dictionary meaning of "agile" denotes the ability to respond to change. The labelling of *agile* was initially promoted in 2001 in the discipline of software development as a shifting mindset with the idea of

"uncovering better ways of developing software" (Agile Alliance, 2021). Since then, the same values of agile principles have been extended to other disciplines, such as agile project management. The business community has rapidly adopted agile principles, and "business agility" is now a commonly accepted agile concept in research and practice (Atlassian, 2021).

Unsurprisingly, opportunities for and challenges of agile methodologies have been researched heavily in the areas of software development and project management (Williams, 2012). Academic research activities have also been investigated using agile principles; however, these studies are viewed primarily through the lens of agile project management—that is, treating research work as a project (Serrador & Pinto, 2015). In this chapter, I use the lens of agile principles applied in the PhD research journey. However, my agile value proposition is not directed towards the project management of research work, but instead it is looking at managing the expectations and outcomes of the PhD by publication journey. Table 10.1 demonstrates how the value statements of the Agile manifesto can be transposed for the PhD by publication studies. While the Agile manifesto challenged traditional software development with its new mindset, the corresponding value statements for the PhD by publication can be positioned against the traditional thesis development for a PhD degree.

The agile values are congruent with the value statements of the design of the PhD by publication for doctoral degrees. Firstly, it makes sense to be able to receive feedback on key concepts, literature gaps, data analysis and findings based on the academic peer-review system rather than via a final dissertation examination at the end. The final thesis is the summative work that is a culmination of years of effort, and it is often considered too difficult to be objectively evaluated (Merga et al., 2020). Alternatively,

Table 10.1 Value statements: Agile manifesto versus thesis by publication

Agile value statement	Thesis by publication value statement
Individuals and interactions over processes and tools	**Peer review of research findings** over final thesis examination
Working software over comprehensive documentation	**Journal article(s)** over dissertation document
Customer collaboration over contract negotiation	**Collaborative knowledge generation** over solitary ideas creation
Responding to change over following a plan	**Multiple publication opportunities** over following a concrete plan for dissertation

feedback received during the peer-review system is useful even if a submission is rejected because the comments offered by reviewers to justify their arguments for rejection can be very insightful. Typically, the feedback received from a paper rejection decision that has passed through the initial editor screening process is more extensive and useful to reposition thesis ideas and conceptualisation. What is important in this case is supportive supervisory mentoring so that PhD students do not become disheartened by the decision and/or by critical comments. I often recall one of my PhD supervisor's strategies on how he processes paper rejection: strictly one minute to process the grief and agony of the rejection decision, and then a quick turnaround into a positive mindset for the joy of the next opportunity, regardless of whether he agreed or disagreed with the reviewer comments. "This is nothing different from how we live our lives on a daily basis", he chuckled when we were confronted with our first joint paper rejection. After several rounds of rejection experiences, I think that I can better understand the gravity of his words. As I embark on the journey of supervising new researchers, this is a very important lesson that I try to convey early. The agile principles support this idea—agile assumes failure as part of its principles, and a low failure culture does not work in an academic career akin to other areas such as public governance (Mergel et al., 2021).

Secondly, since the PhD by publication emphasises the production of a "chunked" nugget of knowledge contribution from one part of the research work or collected data to be submitted as a journal article, this approach promotes efficiency, accessibility and an enhanced mechanism of the dissemination of findings (Merga et al., 2020). In agile principles, this value statement is outcome-driven and prioritises quick wins over a lengthy process-driven result. Project management or software development activities cannot be reasonably compared with research work that may be highly unstructured, open-ended and exploratory in nature. Therefore, the outcome-driven value proposition can be challenging to implement. Even though I previously declared that these agile principles do not strictly correlate to research project management, this value statement of publishing journal articles over writing a full dissertation document is outcome-driven and dependent on external factors that are outside the control of students, supervisory teams and the university. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the time pressures and how best to manage the publishing journey to uphold this value statement. There is no easy solution to this problem; therefore, the university research entity as well as the supervisory team

need to support a student's journey here by managing the standards and expectations in the PhD by publication journey—in areas such as offering flexibility related to the number, type and quality of journal publications, as well as the accepted levels of submission and the status of the peer review of articles. This is because it is unfair to justify the merits of a PhD just by looking at the publications (Coriat, 2019). Consequently, a successful PhD by publication examination may not require any journal articles to be accepted—however, scaffolding the appropriate level of academic rigour is critical.

The third value statement about collaborative knowledge generation is, in my view, the most significant for PhD students. This is where the mission and objectives of a tenured academic and PhD student are strategically aligned, and where synergies can be drawn to work together. By adopting this team-based agile principle, a supervisor's role shifts from an initial mentor position to a collaborative co-author. A collaborative framework such as the agile research network approach (Barroca et al., 2018) paves a pathway for the supervisors to work with PhD students as team members. During the iterative research process (see Fig. 10.1), there are opportunities for PhD students to become involved in a four-step sprint cycle for each publication potential. These sprint cycles can start with *collaboration kick-offs* involving supervisors and other interested academics/fellow students in the same area, ensuring of course that the PhD student leads this process and develops terms of reference for effective collaboration. The PhD student then invites other team members during the crucial phase of the *investigation of the focus areas* for the research cycle. This approach is useful for PhD students to obtain an enlarged set of knowledge from experts and experienced academics. At this stage, the PhD student may consider inviting interested individuals to collaborate more deeply as co-authors, and this could be outside the supervisory team if the university policy allows such collaborations. The next stage is *implementation*, where the PhD student takes ownership of the ideas and works on the compilation of the major substantive draft of the paper. This is significant work for the PhD student, and it is important to justify her or his lead author position during this stage. Finally, the *evaluation* stage is where the team is re-convened to offer feedback and to work on quick review cycles. This is a widely accepted agile collaboration model that can be exercised by the PhD student, and offering this type of support network can boost the research culture at the university. Figure 10.2 outlines the four-step sprint cycle for publication using the agile collaboration model.
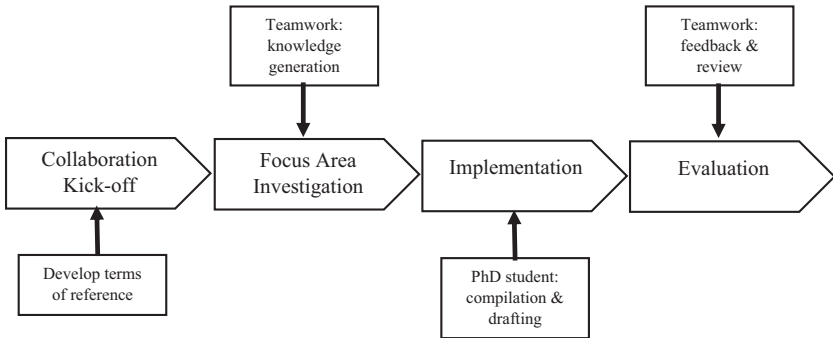
Fig. 10.2 Sprint cycle for publication using the agile collaboration model (adapted from Barroca et al., 2018)

Finally, the fourth value statement refers to looking at quick publication opportunities rather than working on the long dissertation plan. This principle again goes to the heart of the agile manifesto where the ability to respond to change is more critical than long-term planning. This may appear to conflict with the broader vision of knowledge discovery required for a PhD study; however, there is little doubt that the academic community is expected to deliver the applied knowledge—the answer to the "So what?" question, along with the academic contribution component (Radder, 2017). We refer back to the chunking principle here; however, PhD by publication students must develop an opportunistic mindset in terms of watching out for relevant calls for papers, participating in relevant academic conferences and networking with relevant scholars whereby the chunked ideas of their research outputs can be published.

With the four value principles based on the agile principles discussed, the following section presents a critical reflection on my personal experiences of supervising three students in their PhD by publication journey.

Critical Reflection on My PhD by Publication Supervisory Experience

I have previous software development and IT project management experience using the agile methodology. My background encouraged me to adopt the agile principles when the PhD by publication pathway was introduced at the university where I work. I would personally have loved this

mechanism of PhD pathway, but it was not possible at the university from where I graduated at the time of my PhD journey. However, when this opportunity of PhD by publication was made available at the university where I worked, I convinced two of my traditional thesis PhD students, Alice and Bob, to convert to the PhD by publication pathway. Next, I present my supervision experiences of directing and supporting all three PhD by publication students.

Alice[1] and the Parallel Publication Strategy

My first PhD student was Alice, who worked on the development of logistics models for sustainable supply chain practices in regional Australia. Alice had a postgraduate degree and experience in industrial engineering before she embarked on her PhD to apply her engineering skills to business logistics decision modelling. Her technical expertise provided a critical input for her research methodology, since she had previously published academic papers that used mathematical modelling for operations management. In this context, she wanted her PhD to make a real-world impact on the business world.

Alice developed three research papers structured around her three related but independent logistics models that were designed to promote efficient and sustainable supply chain practices to deliver regional Australian products across the country and overseas. The first paper built a model that explained the role of regional airports to distribute perishable agricultural products to the Australian capital cities, and she considered different government subsidy schemes that could influence air-freight distributions. Likewise, the second paper looked into the impacts of carbon emissions arising from the road transportation of perishable products in the cold supply chain whereby the carbon tax regulation and uncertain market demands were considered. Finally, her third paper investigated road and rail modes in terms of the sustainability of the transport networks to deliver livestock products from regional centres to large cities. For this mode, she considered the factors of animal welfare and environmental impacts from fuel consumption.

I introduced Alice to the idea of completing a PhD by publication early during one of our initial brainstorming sessions by asking her to visualise the areas where she could develop the logistics models. The supervisory

---

[1] The students' names have been anonymised.

team worked with Alice to provide a relevant business context for her research, and we considered the three major transport modes—air, rail and road—in the Toowoomba region of the state of Queensland in Australia. Toowoomba was represented as an ideal region for the three transport modes because the Toowoomba Bypass was constructed in 2019 as an alternative road crossing of the Toowoomba range to improve freight efficiency. Adjacent to the bypass, a jet-capable international airport—Toowoomba Wellcamp Airport—had become operational with regular cargo services to Hong Kong. The airport is also strategically located near the planned Australian inland rail corridor that links Melbourne with Brisbane. This made Toowoomba a very strategic location for a potential road-air-rail hub, thereby providing a sound premise for Alice's research to demonstrate the business application of her logistics models.

Once we had found real-world business applications for Alice's research, it was relatively straightforward to follow a parallel and independent publication strategy to work with Alice in her PhD by publication research. The agile principles were applied to look at the three models as three parts of research that could be published independently while a cohesive research study based on the business context was developed. Alice adopted the agile value statements with the three iterative cycles to build the relevant models based on the relevant business parameters. I discussed the scope for the relevant literature review, and I offered relevant discussions of the three papers to connect an engineering solution to business problems in the area of supply chains. Alice completed her full-time PhD study on time, with two of the three papers already accepted for publication while the third paper is under review, all in high-quality journal outlets. The value statements related to iterations of journal articles and multiple publishing opportunities offered authentic experiences in Alice's PhD journey.

Bob and the Iterative Publication Strategy

Bob enrolled as a part-time, online PhD student in 2016 while working full-time as an ICT professional who wanted to build his research expertise in his work practice. I met Bob at an ICT industry seminar, where he initially explained his innovative idea to solve an industry challenge and wanted to research into this space building on my existing research in this area. Bob had over 15 years of IT service management assessment experience (see Shrestha, et al., 2020 for an understanding of IT Service

Management assessments), and he identified that the ICT industry had a problem that he coined as "multi-framework complexity"—that is, too many ICT frameworks with frequent updates that were very hard for ICT practitioners to keep up with. He had a broad conceptual model based on innovation-centric knowledge commons (see Hess and Ostrom [2007] for an introduction to knowledge commons). Without a clear understanding of the research design and data collection strategies, Bob firstly enrolled in the traditional PhD degree and initially focused on the research methodology training offered by the university.

Bob was originally not very keen to adopt the agile principles in his PhD journey, even though he is an agile expert in IT project management at work. Bob saw his PhD journey as an intensive research exercise with aspirations to develop a comprehensive dissertation, and such principles were indoctrinated from his family background where his spouse and daughter both had PhD degrees and research careers. Therefore, in my work with Bob, I did not need to explain the concepts of agile principles, but Bob did not see those principles as applicable to his PhD research.

Things changed after one year of his study, as he became clear about his research design and how his research work can be modularised. He then focused on endorsing his research ideas with academic rigour from academic conference presentations before publishing his literature review work and his conceptual framework in his first journal article. Bob followed an iterative publication strategy because of his mental frame of looking at his research more holistically before delving into details. Therefore, Bob's second article built on the overarching conceptual model and expanded the model into the development of design principles. Bob then worked on a third paper where the design principles were applied and evaluated in a case study setting. As Bob progressed, he was keen to explore his ideas in different settings outside of core research focus—for example, higher education, knowledge management and industry-academia collaboration. With the three required papers for his PhD already in the pipeline, Bob was now interested to publish more about his ideas applied to these different settings. Continuing from this, the PhD by publication value statement about collaborative knowledge generation became more applicable to him. This was because Bob and I engaged in fortnightly meetings to work on writing these ideas into paper drafts for future publications, which was rewarding for both of us. The PhD by publication journey helped Bob to apply the iterative research process to an iterative publication strategy. This strategy may be risky for a full-time student who

wants to complete the PhD degree in three years, and to build an academic career thereafter. Bob's case was different, as he was an established professional and he sought the PhD for academic endorsement of his ideas. Therefore, the iterative publication strategy requires a confident start to understanding the research gap and an innovative solution. The PhD student then unpacks the research work on these settings and looks into finer details. This strategy was a great fit in Bob's circumstances.

Cathy and the Sequential Publication Strategy

Cathy was an international full-time student with a postgraduate coursework degree in software engineering who had had limited academic research training prior to commencing her PhD studies. Cathy did not have research methodology training; however, she learnt these skills very quickly as a full-time student, and she was able to apply these skills to explore research gaps in her area of interest. Unlike Alice, who came with academic publication experience, or Bob, who had extensive industry experience with research impact, Cathy had to adapt her learning skills quickly in the context of the Australian research environment. I did not suggest the PhD by publication pathway to Cathy until her second year, because she needed to explore the literature to identify a topical area for her research first.

Cathy explored different topics under the key discipline areas of IT innovation and knowledge management before finally settling on the topic of "The role of cloud computing towards knowledge ambidexterity". I had frequent meetings with Cathy in the first year to define clearly a PhD topic that can withstand academic scrutiny, and we re-tuned the topic to the context of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), where the topic appeared to deliver significant impact, in terms of both research and practice. To position this research gap strongly, I suggested that Cathy develop a protocol to conduct a systematic literature review (SLR) of her topic areas. Cathy spent eight months executing and writing up the SLR work that had the potential to be published in its own right. This was where I could see Cathy's remarkable progress, and suggested that she follow a sequential publication strategy to complete her PhD by publication.

The PhD by publication pathway worked for Cathy because it demonstrated a rather linear progression of her research studies over three years. The first paper was published in a reputable knowledge management journal that was keen to report the latest state-of-the-art information in the

field of knowledge management and cloud computing. This paper laid the foundation for Cathy to justify her research gap. Cathy then developed her research design of longitudinal case studies of seven SMEs that were trained to use cloud technologies to manage knowledge with pre-intervention and post-intervention data collection. As empirical data were collected, Cathy developed the second paper that used partial data from her research to discuss the role of technology-driven innovation powered by cloud services. Finally, the third paper reported the overall findings and discussions from empirical data presented as a design science research (see Hevner et al. [2004] for an introduction to design science research in information systems).

The PhD by publication value statement about the peer review of research findings was a vital research consideration in Cathy's PhD progress. The peer-review feedback that Cathy received about her first paper (two rejections before an acceptance decision) was critical for not only getting the paper published, but also for laying a necessary foundation for the future direction of her research work. Likewise, the comments received from the journal editors and reviewers about her second paper helped her to write her third paper. The agile principles that Cathy applied became very obvious in her third year, since every paper submission offered feedback to help to develop her ideas and to write up the next paper.

Figure 10.3 represents the three different publication strategies that worked for my PhD students in their different contexts, and it provides a visual representation of their respective publication pathways. I must stress that these are not the only publication strategies, and that caution should be exercised about applying a particular strategy to a student because this is dependent on the student's circumstances—for example, PhD goals, career status and enrolment types—as well as the student's motivation to adopt the agile principles and to follow the value statements presented in Table 10.1.

Conclusion

Reflecting on my students' PhD study experiences and research impact, the adoption of agile principles offered interesting insights into the student journey and outcomes. I argue that PhD study experiences can be enriched when agile principles are followed, mainly in terms of ensuring that the PhD study is industry-relevant and results in employable research skills that lead to rewarding career pathways for our students, both in

Doctoral student	Publication strategy	Publication pathway
Alice	Parallel	Introduction P1 → P2 → P3 → Conclusion
Bob	Iterative	Introduction P1 → P2 → P3 → Conclusion
Cathy	Sequential	Introduction P1 → P2 → P3 → Conclusion
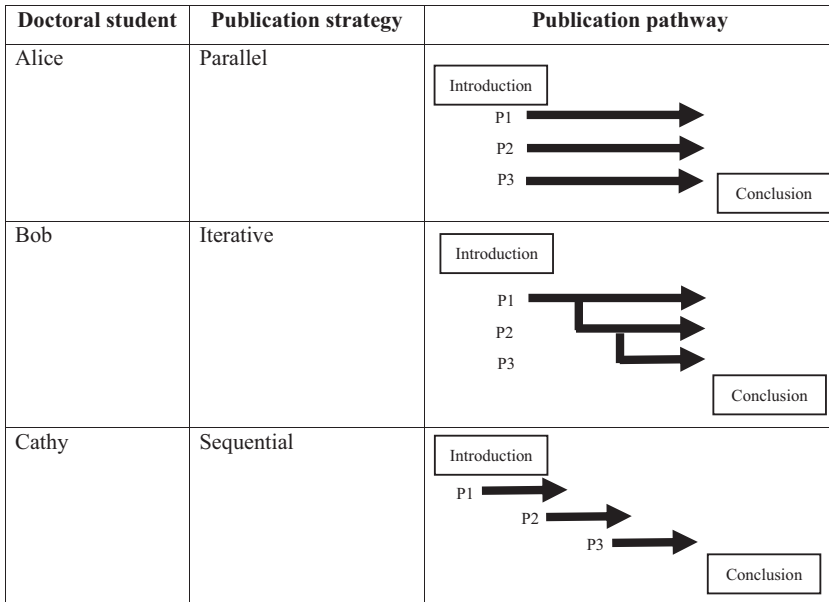
Fig. 10.3 Framing of publication pathways in a thesis by publication journey

academia and in industry. The publication track record meant that the students started building academic reputation during their studies, and this led to stronger emotional aspirations as a direct result of the PhD by publication format (Merga et al., 2020). Likewise, PhD by publication, when adopting agile principles, improved research impact by promoting shorter and more impactful research story dissemination. I hope that the agile principles and the four value statements can be useful for PhD students and their supervision teams to enrich their study experiences as well as their research impact that leads to employability opportunities in academia and industry.

References

Agile   Alliance.   (2021).   https://www.agilealliance.org/agile101/the-agile-manifesto/
Atlassian. (2021). https://www.atlassian.com/agile

Author unacknowledged. (1968). Is a PhD worth having? *Nature, 220*(168), 641–642. https://doi.org/10.1038/220641a0

Author unacknowledged. (2010). The disposable academic. The Economist Intelligence Unit N. A., Incorporated, London. https://www.economist.com/christmas-specials/2010/12/16/the-disposable-academic

Barroca, L., Sharp, H., Salah, D., Taylor, K., & Gregory, P. (2018). Bridging the gap between research and agile practice: An evolutionary model. *International Journal of System Assurance Engineering and Management, 9*(2), 323–334.

Chen, S. (2021). Leaving academia: Why do doctoral graduates take up non-academic jobs and to what extent are they prepared? *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education*, Pre-print. https://doi.org/10.1108/SGPE-08-2020-0057

Coriat, A. M. (2019). PhD merit needs to be defined by more than just publications. *Nature Human Behaviour, 3*(10), 1007–1007.

Cyranoski, D., Gilbert, N., Ledford, H., Nayar, A., & Yahia, M. (2011). Education: The PhD factory. *Nature, 472*(7343), 276–279. https://doi.org/10.1038/472276a

Hess, C., & Ostrom, E. (2007). Introduction: An overview of the knowledge commons. In E. Ostrom (Ed.), *Understanding knowledge as a commons: From theory to practice* (pp. 3–26). MIT Press.

Hevner, A., March, S. T., Park, J., & Ram, S. (2004). Design science research in information systems. *MIS Quarterly, 28*(1), 75–105.

Litalien, D. (2015). Improving PhD completion rates: Where should we start? *The Wiley Network*. https://www.wiley.com/network/researchers/writing-and-conducting-research/improving-phd-completion-rates-where-should-we-start

Merga, M. K., Mason, S., & Morris, J. E. (2020). "What do I even call this?": Challenges and possibilities of undertaking a thesis by publication. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 44*(9), 1245–1261.

Mergel, I., Ganapati, S., & Whitford, A. B. (2021). Agile: A new way of governing. *Public Administration Review, 81*(1), 161–165.

Purcell, K., Elias, P., Durbin, S., Davies, R., & Warren, S. (2006). *The employment of social science PhDs in academic and non-academic jobs: Research skills and postgraduate training*. Economic and Social Research Council.

Radder, H. (2017). Which scientific knowledge is a common good? *Social Epistemology, 31*(5), 431–450.

Russell-Pinson, L., & Harris, M. L. (2019). Anguish and anxiety, stress and strain: Attending to writers' stress in the dissertation process. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 43*, 63–71.

Serrador, P., & Pinto, J. K. (2015). Does agile work? A quantitative analysis of agile project success. *International Journal of Project Management, 33*(5), 1040–1051.

Shrestha, A., Cater-Steel, A., Toleman, M., Behari, S., & Rajaeian, M. M. (2020). Development and evaluation of a software-mediated process assessment method for IT service management. *Information & Management, 57*(4), 103213.

Torka, M. (2020). Change and continuity in Australian doctoral education: PhD completion rates and times (2005–2018). *Australian Universities' Review, 26*(2), 69–82. https://www.nteu.org.au/article/Change-and-continuity-in-Australian-doctoral-education%3A-PhD-completion-rates-and-times-%282005-2018%29-%28AUR-62-02%29-22291#:~:text=The%20percentage%20of%20students%20who,23%20per%20cent%20in%202017

Williams, L. (2012). What agile teams think of agile principles. *Communications of the ACM, 55*(4), 71–76.

Woolston, C. (2019). PhDs: The tortuous truth. *Nature, 575*(7782), 403.

Young, S. N., Vanwye, W. R., Schafer, M. A., Robertson, T. A., & Poore, A. V. (2019). Factors affecting PhD student success. *International Journal of Exercise Science, 12*(1), 34–45.

Persistent Myths About Dissertation Writing and One Proven Way of Breaking Free of Their Spell

Natalia Kovalyova

INTRODUCTION

Writing a dissertation is the single most important—in fact, the culminating—activity of one's graduate career. Yet it is routinely conducted under immense pressure, with much effort wasted, and with little chance to excel in the genre by getting a second shot at it. Because the route of trial and error is closed, the path to a "done" dissertation has grown an extended mythology around itself. Tips from books, blogs and conversations abound, and are often contradictory: "Outline, outline, outline" and "Write first, then outline the written"; "Assign yourself a daily norm and stick to it" and "Do not interrupt the flow". Having puzzled over these writing aporia myself, I concluded that all of them present honest and reasonable advice worthy of adopting, albeit not at the same time. In what

N. Kovalyova (✉)
University of North Texas, Denton, TX, USA
e-mail: nvk@utexas.edu

follows, I specifically address outlining and daily writing, and I tease out the rationale for each seemingly conflicting tip so that readers can make an informed decision selecting an approach that best fits their circumstances and their work habits.

To Outline or Not to Outline

Outlines are my pet peeve on the subject of writing, largely because prior to working on a dissertation, I did not take a formal writing class, nor had I contemplated writing as my regular activity. Everything that I wrote before my dissertation year came as a struggle, from an introduction to what I hoped could pass for a conclusion. I couldn't fail to notice though that my instructors and peers subscribed to relentless outlining. "Do not start writing before you are crystal clear on the roadmap that you are going to follow" was their recommendation to me. I diligently complied, but I could not quite make the utility of an outline work for me. As I sat down to write, I often discovered new angles not available at the planning stage, I moved paragraphs for effect and I deviated from the initial plan. To complicate the matter, my dissertation advisor was a great believer in outlines and required to see one of each chapter. I obliged and produced a mandatory two-pager. None of the chapters that followed matched what I had proposed since for each, I would read more, write along and fine-tune my argument. Moreover, my dissertation grew in patches. I first completed my "data chapters", which eventually became Chapters Four through Six. Next to be written was a literature review, significantly revised from the dissertation proposal. Then I wrote a conclusion and an intro-duction (in that order), aligning the early promises with the deliverables, and, finally, I detailed my methods, describing how the study had actually proceeded.

Because I never considered myself a good writer, I accepted that I was entering the writing process through the backdoor, so to speak: putting things on paper first to shape them up through multiple revisions. Naturally, the suggestion to outline first did not resonate with me. Yet I was not against outlining. I was—and still am—against treating an outline as a contract for what the final piece should look like. I was also—and still am—against treating writing as a uniform process with definitive steps taken in a particular order. Additionally, I felt that the insistence on a detailed outline wants a table of contents before the very content is cre-ated, and turns writing into a contractual obligation to fill up

predetermined slots. Raised in the humanities, I would surely rebel against such an approach. Writing to learn and discover, I often do not know what I think on a topic until I jot down a few ideas and organise them into a coherent whole. Outlining first wanted me to have all my points identified before my text could emerge. I disagreed profoundly, and I continued producing text first. More experienced writers would have by now recognised that I resorted to reverse outlining, a process quite legitimate and practised by many academics but still not widely embraced in the classroom. Because both approaches to outlining work, there is merit in looking at the assumptions built around them and at the advantages attributed to creating outlines by different means.

Why We Outline

Since I write first and outline later, I am particularly attuned to enthusiastic pronouncements of the merits of the outline-first approach. While outlines discipline the writing process and minimise deviations and tangents, they serve multiple goals beyond focusing one's writing.

Two pages that I wrote for my doctoral dissertation advisor worked as excellent tools of communication demonstrating my compliance with his requests. After all, he was to sign off on the finished product, and being stubborn was an unwise strategy on my part. Moreover, he patiently worked with me as I changed my topic three times before settling for the one with which I could live long enough to graduate, and he read my drafts submitted in a most peculiar order. Putting a plausible outline as a projection of a chapter was too small of a request to decline. So I created them diligently. Beyond facilitating approval to proceed with writing, outlines have proven to make wonderful taming devices for various complexities of the writing process. As cumulative wisdom has it:

- An outline restrains wandering off on tangents and chasing exciting new ideas. When the latter happens, it helps with finding one's way back.
- An outline reduces the stress about the material to cover and presents in some order the points to elaborate, ensuring that, if that order is followed, all relevant points will be addressed (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, p. 146).
- An outline helps to create a balanced presentation of ideas (Allen, 2019, pp. 34-35) and to evaluate the overall organisation for logic

and depth. This function can further be strengthened by listing a word count for each section, instantly sizing up the volume—and depth—of the proposed sections.

- Relatedly, an outline warns against randomly throwing in "just one more point".
- Consequently, it helps to reorganise the material, filling in the gaps and cutting the unnecessary passages. In other words, it comes in handy when editing (Allen, 2019; Foss & Waters, 2007).
- Finally, it helps to project the reader's reaction to the text. No matter the nuanced wording, readers crave a scannable overview of an argument, and, in this regard, some structure is always better than no structure (Booth et al., 2008; Germano, 2014). Although dissertation writers are typically concerned with one reader only—their advisor—and write for his or her eyes first, adopting the reader's perspective comes to the foreground when revising dissertations into books for broader, more general audiences.

This roster of purposes casts doubts on the existence of a single outline that can guide an entire dissertation project. In fact, any writing project of a considerable size likely uses several of them, each tailored for a specific stage of work. When an outline stops being a useful tool and becomes self-sufficient or, worse, turns into a roadblock keeping one from putting words on paper, it is imperative to reconsider its guidance, to regroup and to do what it takes to keep writing. In other words, if perfecting an outline consumes all the time allocated to the project, day in and day out, it makes more sense to sketch in broadest strokes a few major ideas and then to start writing. Perfecting the tool in anticipation of its magical performance afterwards can develop into a sophisticated form of procrastination already widespread among graduate students in the dissertation writing stage. With the goal to complete (and defend) a dissertation, you should be watching your progress towards that goal and eliminate the barriers even if they come disguised as writing-related tasks. An outline that does not set you in a writing mode is not doing its job and has to be put aside until the first full draft is produced.

The Many Faces of an Outline

To prevent an outline from becoming "a nuisance" (Booth et al., 2008, p. 187), some scholars of writing recommend deploying *topic-based* and *point-based* outlines at different stages in the process. A topic-based outline (really a rough sketch of ideas) guides the first draft, while a point-based outline presents the overall organisation and the sequence of ideas. The latter may come after a full draft is spelt out, but it is necessary nonetheless for testing an argument and subsequent editing.

Some writing scholars differentiate among outlines by *length* and *detail*. For instance, Peggy Boyle Single (2009) discussed a one-page document and a long outline. The former works well as an evaluation and communication device; the latter (with references) guides the text creation. Booth et al. (2008) also mentioned a third type of outline that complemented their topic and point-based versions and called it an *argument* outline. Ultimately, though, the number and types of outlines that a writer uses are less important than the fact that an outline itself is a work in progress and transforms as the writing advances, reflecting a writer's current thinking on the topic. So it is appropriate not only to edit your draft but also to edit your outline, capturing your most recent envisioning of the project.

Note that no writing manual recommends postponing writing until an extended/long/point-based outline is worked out. If we posit that an extended outline alone sanctions the start of the process, we face a serious danger of investing too much time and effort in it and of eventually overdoing it. Of course, it is always possible to under-organise and to start working off a sketch that offers little assistance in producing the text, but the pervasive mantra of "outlining first" is more likely than not to lead to over-organising and to create a false belief that writing cannot start until a blueprint is completed.

So how detailed should an outline be? In the light of the aforementioned discussion, this very legitimate question has no definitive answer. I have always admired technical manuals with seven or eight levels of organisation in their tables of contents. Yet, that admiration notwithstanding, the scholarship of persuasion teaches us that long lists look impressive only when we have no time to engage with the subject matter. On a closer inspection, garlands of subheadings may come across as trappings covering up trivial distinctions or as merely padding the presentation. Fragmenting an argument into a "fruit cocktail" of minuscule points risks losing readers in the hierarchy of subheadings, and may interfere with

their perceptions of the whole and of the writer's integrity (Dunleavy, 2003, pp. 70-82).

To underscore one more time, there is no ideal outline for a given topic, and one should not attempt it. One's treatment of a topic captured by an outline is subject to change, so it is bound to be different at different times. Moreover, even a seemingly flawless outline is not a text but its anticipation. So make peace with it and keep writing.

From an Outline to a Text

Once we come to terms with the fact that outlines are living documents, fluid and prone to transformations, it inevitably follows that the order of writing is flexible as well, and that writing can start with any section or any chapter, for that matter. Because we tend to read in a linear fashion, we imagine that writing follows a linear trajectory as well, but it does not necessarily do so, so the first thing written for a dissertation project may not be the introduction. You may start with data analysis and discuss the results before moving to other chapters. What is crucial is to be writing all the time, making a step towards the final goal of a "done" dissertation. There is, however, one person with whom it is important to come to an agreement about the order in which you will be submitting individual chapters, and that is your advisor. While some prefer reading chapters in the conventional order, there is always room for an argument as to why you would like them to see a draft of Chapter X before they could see your Introduction or a Literature Review.

What definitely could be completed any time independently of the main body of the dissertation are the accessory sections: acknowledgements; your vita; tables, figures and other graphic materials; bibliography; and such. These writing tasks are perfect for working on when you are having a bad day and feel tired or stuck.

To summarise, outlines are the tools to organise your writing; they are flexible and develop along with your project. If you write better only with a detailed roadmap in front of you, by all means, create one; however, if and when outlining stops you in the tracks, it is appropriate to put it aside for later and to start writing guided by general themes. Outlining and organisation will then resume when the first "shitty" draft—to borrow a phrase from Anne Lamott (1995)—has been spelt out. For those readers who have already started worrying about the (extra) time it takes to

produce a polished piece of writing without a detailed outline, the next section offers a few words of wisdom.

DISSERTATION MATHEMATICS

In college, students typically learn to master term papers. Many can estimate pretty accurately how long it will take them to produce a paper and can schedule work accordingly without pulling an all-nighter at the end of the semester. Many develop a good sense for 6000–7000 word-long manuscripts, a size common for submission to academic journals. Significantly less clarity exists about the parameters of dissertations as writing projects: how long they need to be, how long they take, how different a chapter is from a term paper. Uncertainty about such formalities adds to the general anxiety of graduate school. While writing and research skills that support the production of a dissertation are practised before and after it, one's performance in the genre of a dissertation is a singular occurrence. This makes every doctoral candidate a trailblazer who collects communal wisdom for the journey. In the following section, I revisit several how-tos about daily writing and scheduling, paying particular attention to the bits of quantification that are reiterated in the dissertation writing folklore. Dissertation self-help books with marketable titles such as *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day* (Bolker, 1998) make good sales pitches, but dissertation talk on campus usually shies away from numeric terms, even though analytics on dissertation writing exist and offer a valuable perspective on the task and the process.

Having considered the dissertation mathematics—the size of the final document, the number of hours/days/months to completion, daily quotas for writing and so forth—we stand a good chance of dispelling a dense mythology around dissertation writing and understanding whether our own projects follow central tendencies or already call for rescue operations. Shedding quantitative light on dissertation projects, I aim solely at reducing anxiety and at inserting some degree of confidence in one's capacity to finish successfully.

But there is a more practical consideration to it as well. A realistic projection of how long a dissertation might take is an important factor to consider when making decisions about housing, spousal employment, childcare, medical insurance and similar matters that need covering while you are writing and might not be able to work full-time. The numbers cited further in the chapter are offered as a guarding rail to hold onto,

keeping in mind that your individual circumstances and your own rhythms will necessarily introduce adjustments to them.

I have used my own progress through the doctoral programme as an example of where "dissertation mathematics" is handy. I graduated in 11 long semesters (not counting summers), having completed the course-work in four semesters and passing comprehensive exams in the fifth semester. My departmental financial support lasted eight semesters and for the last three semesters in the doctoral program I went unfunded. My work as a resident assistant in a dorm ten hours a week secured my housing, but did not bring additional money. I worked there to live for free. My personal savings covered all other expenses: food, books, occassional doctor's appointments, mailing job applications (in those days, one had to mail packages) and so forth. Between my last pay cheque from graduate school and my first pay cheque on a new job, there were 28 months of no income. Had I had a better idea about the time and money that I would need to finish writing, my overall planning would have been radically different. Unfortunately, my department (like many) did not quantify dissertation writing, probably out of fear of instilling deterministic thinking, and I discovered the "dissertation mathematics" too late to be able to make realistic plans. I am offering a compilation of it here, hoping that it will help others to make more informed decisions and to emerge out of graduate school with fewer losses.

Quantifying a Larger Picture

The only book on dissertation writing in my field of communication studies, *Destination Dissertation* by Foss and Waters (2007), came out when I was in the midst of it. Still, it clarified a lot for me in terms of workload, time commitment, steps in the process and so forth. It also quoted 1440 hours as the time to completion—that is, from conceptualisation and prospectus writing to defence. To me, this estimate was not generous enough and imagined accomplished writers with an established writing routine making steady progress. I did not fit that image a single bit.

Other sources that I consulted estimated from 11 to 22 months for a dissertation project, with 15 months being the average. In my graduate cohort, a chapter was written in four to six weeks; the work on literature reviews took about 10 hours per book and close to three hours per article; and dissertations were five to seven chapters long. Fifth-year defences were not rare, but leaving ABD to start an academic position had all but

disappeared. Still, it was a better record than that of the neighbouring Department of English which quoted seven years as becoming a typical time to completion for doctoral dissertations. Granted, many factors contribute to one's progress through the programme, and many reflect the "culture" of the place—that is, the way that things are done in your department and the university. Your case might turn exceptional, but it will unfold in the already-existing environment with its established practices, protocols, some cemented norms and (occassionally) rigid attitudes, so it pays to be aware of the hoops, hurdles and support resources that others have encountered. They will factor in your progress as well.

Another numeric that I found useful was the length of dissertation manuscripts. On average, dissertations stand at about 240 pages long. The smallest text that I came acrosss was 110 pages long—a mere master's thesis in my field. The largest exceeded 600 pages. Unlike European universities where master's and PhD theses have a word count attached to them, American universities do not have either word count or page number requirements. The decision about whether a dissertation is "there" rests with the dissertation committee. To be on the safe side, I would recommend that dissertation writers check what has been defended *under their advisor*. Looking at other people's dissertations is instructive in itself and will inevitably enrich one's rhetorical repertoire. However, it is your advisor who is going to give you the green light on the project, so learn what he or she has approved previously and pay attention to the organisation, the methodology, the treatment of the results, the direction taken by the conclusions and the size of individual chapters and of the text overall of the dissertations that he or she directed. Those are likely to reveal the patterns and features that they recognise as formative of the genre and as signals that a dissertation is "there". My advisor had passed dissertations organised in seven chapters: an introduction, a literature review, four "data" chapters, and a conclusion. Variations were welcome only in the categorization criteria for the data chapters (geographical regions, or styles, or time periods, or persons, etc.).

Planning your dissertation journey, it is also important to figure out whether your advisor will be willing to accept your schedule (and therefore to be sympathetic to your outside commitments), or whether she could guide your project only at her own pace. On my first day in the graduate programme, I learned that my advisor "does dissertations" in five years, and that that had been the case for the past 40 years. He could not be rushed. He would not speed up because, in his view, dissertations do

not gestate in a shorter period of time. And he would not approve of a half-baked product. I made it in five and a half years, producing a dissertation seven chapters long.

Relatedly, it helps to know your dissertation advisor's turnaround time for feedback on your work. Most faculty maintain a two-week cycle. Some work in longer instalments. Find out what they are comfortable with and construct your schedule accordingly, being mindful of crunch times such as grading periods, conference submission deadlines, days away at national conventions and work on any major grants that could crowd your advisor's calendar. Under no circumstances, though, should you consider the time that you are waiting for feedback as an opportunity to take a break. Instead, shift your attention to the next chapter, or do other dissertation-related work such as writing an acknowledgement. You will be able to look at your work with a new eye once it is returned, and you will already have made inroads into the next section.

The Daily Norm

Discussing outlines, I mentioned that a word count attached to subsections helps planning daily writing. This, of course, assumes that you know your writing pace—that is, how many words/pages of relatively clean prose you can produce in a day without exhausting yourself. By trial and error, I discovered that my ultimate length for a writing session is 90 minutes, so I would schedule two-hour blocks in the early morning (usually before 7 am) to accommodate settling down with my coffee, bathroom breaks and an occasional cup refill. I edited later in the day, spending on it three times longer than composing per se, and sometimes completing as few as four pages a day, literally chiselling at the text.

Estimating how much (approximately) you will need to write, it is possible to figure out your "daily norm"—that is, the volume that you will be producing every day during your writing sessions. Daily norms are expressed in several ways: some use the word count and do not get off the chair until exactly that many words have been typed up; others go with pages and hold themselves accountable to produce, say, two pages a day. Still others, like myself, are guided by their energy and the span of their attention, and list their "daily norm" in minutes or hours. Establishing the daily norm creates a benchmark that allows you to celebrate small accomplishments and to feel good about the progress that you make. But the volume of our daily output is apparently person- and project-specific.

Some severe cases of procrastination have reported setting the daily norm as low as 250 words, which is slightly more than half a page. If you notice that you look for an excuse to be doing other things when you should be writing (such as cleaning your bathroom or organising your desk/closet or searching for the exact time of your dog's next appointment at the vet's), setting the daily norm low will help you to tame your procrastination monster. And to ensure your success, remember to turn off the electronics, disconnect from the internet (strongly recommended), and do not leave your desk/chair until your daily norm is completed.

Chasing the Flow

A point of much confusion around the daily norm is whether or not you should stop after you have achieved it if you could write more. All things being equal, stopping after 500 words (or two pages or 45 minutes) have been completed creates an equivalent of a tiny pat on your back but does little more. Notably, frequent tips on the best ways to get back into the writing mode the next day (e.g., leaving a reminder to yourself about what you wanted to cover next; stopping at an intriguing point of your narrative) imply that stopping is a forced interruption—hence the provisions for re-inserting yourself into the flow. Recommendations for establishing a writing routine (scheduling writing sessions at the same time and in the same place, and minimising outside disruptions) aim at the very same effect: to get you in the best of your productive mood as soon as possible. So why not capture it while it lasts, disregarding (and exceeding) the daily norm?

Several considerations, not necessarily in agreement with one another, buttress the daily norm. First, keeping it creates a barrier to binge-writing—that is, writing in long stretches of time, completing, say, an article in two or three days. There are various reasons why some academics resort to binge-writing; none of those I heard of was happy. Productive writers work regularly and do not rely on binge-writing so, for a dissertation writer, keeping it at bay equals picking up good habits that can sustain a future academic career. Second, interruptions take a toll on the writing process, so it seems only natural to continue working once you are "in the zone" and everything seems to be falling in its place. However, that could be a straight path to exhaustion with a long recovery path. Establishing a daily writing routine disciplines your writing and shortens the time needed to engage fully with your topic after the break. Finally, the daily norm

manages not only your text but also your energy and motivation, thereby ensuring that you can continue the dissertation marathon the next day.

Making all these arrangements, what we actually chase here is the flow. Many accomplished writers testify that waiting for inspiration to descend on you and trigger your writing is a misguided strategy; instead, it is your job as a writer to show up at your desk regularly, and to make sure that you are inspired once the clock has started. Conversely, if you are a writer for whom it is hard to get back "in the zone", it makes total sense not to force yourself to stop after the daily norm is achieved as long as inspiration carries you. Keep working and play by the ear.

Scheduling writing sessions, it is important to remember that in addition to frequent interruptions other enemies that affect the flow drastically are unclear tasks, a mismatch between the challenge and skills, overthinking and trying too hard. But to identify your particular stumbling block, you should first eliminate interruptions. For these reasons, writers who do not have the privilege of working in quiet spaces schedule their writing sessions in the early hours when a chance of receiving a telephone call, an urgent email or a visitor is minimal. Some university libraries provide carrels for graduate students in their final semesters, so it is definitely worth investigating where and when you can write regularly and interruption-free.

"No flow" Days

Somehow, I emerged out of graduate school not knowing about writer's block. It was my students who introduced me to the concept. I am not sure that I have experienced it in a severe form myself, but I most certainly had bad days. I was probably saved from developing writer's block by my own admission that I am not "PhD material", which protected me from the pressure of high expectations for top performance. I was also lucky to discover Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird* (1995) pretty early, and I was grateful for the stories that she shared, particularly her dad's advice to her little brother on writing a school report on birds. "Take them bird by bird" became my strategy for dealing with large projects as well: completing a small portion every day, religiously, without skipping a day, making no excuses and not fantasising about the consequences of my completing it or failing to do so. Later, I discovered that very approach recommended for dealing with writer's block. On particularly bad days, I opened a jar of a special blend of coffee and I brought to the desk my extra special snack

(dried mango strips in lime and chilli pepper) to help me to stay at it. I also took several showers to energise myself. All these trappings cumulatively got me over the finish line, but I would emphasise small, manageable tasks as essential for moving forward. On any given day, I worked on a specific paragraph from Chapter X or Y, cleaned my bibliography, beautified my figures and tables, and I did not allow myself to worry about any other part of the dissertation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to bring the science of writing to bear on dissolving some calcified beliefs about how dissertations are written, and my concluding paragraph reiterates the opening line: tips, suggestions, recommendations and related dissertation writing folklore stem from someone's real experience. They are shared because they have worked, either for one or for many. So, picking one tip over the next, consider what work habits it supports and why, and which one it attempts to keep at bay, factor in your specific circumstances and go with the recommendations that ensure that all your insights are captured, and that new writing appears regularly.

References

Allen, J. E. (2019). *The productive graduate student writer: How to manage your time, process, and energy to write your research proposal, thesis, and dissertation and get published*. Stylus Publishing.

Bolker, J. (1998). *Writing your dissertation in fifteen minutes a day: A guide to starting, revising, and finishing your doctoral thesis*. Holt Paperbacks.

Booth, W. C., Colomb, G. G., & Williams, J. M. (2008). *The craft of research* (3rd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Dunleavy, P. (2003). *Authoring a PhD: How to plan, draft, write and finish a doctoral thesis or dissertation*. Macmillan International Higher Education.

Foss, S. K., & Waters, W. J. C. (2007). *Destination dissertation: A traveler's guide to a done dissertation*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Germano, W. (2014). *From dissertation to book*. University of Chicago Press.

Lamott, A. (1995). *Bird by bird: Some instructions on writing and life*. Anchor Books.

Lunenburg, F. C., & Irby, B. J. (2008). *Writing a successful thesis or dissertation: Tips and strategies for students in the social and behavioral sciences*. SAGE Publications.

Single, P. (2009). *Demystifying dissertation writing: A streamlined process from choice of topic to final text*. Stylus Publishing.

Cracking Through the Wall to Let the Light In: Disrupting Doctoral Discourses Through Collaborative Autoethnography

Dawne Fahey, Esther Fitzpatrick, and Alys Mendus

Introduction

We begin a conversation, three of us across space and time, a poetic re/storying of our doctoral journeys. A juxtaposition of three stories, although you, the reader, become our infinite other. Our stories traverse oceans, from the United Kingdom to Sydney, Australia, and to Auckland, New Zealand. Each of us has felt the breath of Ball's (2012) neoliberal "beast" on our necks demanding accountability. Dawne is a doctoral candidate; Alys, a new mum to Ginny, graduated in 2018 (Mendus, 2017); and

D. Fahey
Western Sydney University, Sydney, NSW, Australia

Faculty of Education and Social Work , The University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

E. Fitzpatrick (✉) • A. Mendus
Western Sydney University, Sydney, NSW, Australia
e-mail: e.fitzpatrick@auckland.ac.nz

191

Esther, a doctoral supervisor, got to wear her floppy hat in 2017. We write our story, deliberately *cracking through the wall to let the light in*, sharing our moments of joy, laughter and friendship.

This project began with, and continues as, a series of emails. We have created a knot, pulling the strands of our different/similar experiences of a PhD journey together, providing a chronological weaving of our stories through a series of emails, including provocations, poems, images, theory and notes of encouragement. The intention is to juxtapose and deconstruct our experiences using arts-based methods and autoethnography.

Research Area and Literature Review

As this study is a collaborative autoethnography (Norris et al., 2012), data were generated via email (see examples in Fitzpatrick & Alansari, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Fitzpatrick, 2015). We intersected theory and story "together in a dance of collaborative engagement", providing language to "unsettle … the ordinary while spinning a good story" (Holman Jones, 2016, p. 2), unearthing subjective understandings of *why we entered and how we survived/are surviving our doctorates*, and opening up silenced conversations to voice important issues (Le Fevre & Sawyer, 2012). As collaborative autoethnographers, we examined the intersection of our lives as doctoral students, mother/s, supervisor, travellers and artists, interrogating our individual experiences within the larger social context.

Poetry worked as analysis and provocation for further writing. These poems are understood as research poems (Faulkner, 2009), the purpose of writing being to *do* something. We each also wrote a poetic response to an image (ekphrasis), consistent with Prendergast's (2004) definition of ekphrasis: a method to "draw out or make clear" (p. 3) the practice of creating art in response to art. We invite you to share in selected fragments of our last six months of correspondence; needless to say, we have not included every email, nor everything communicated.

Dawne: 18/07/2019

I have read your articles, Esther. I enjoyed them, and started writing in response, saying:

> *Yes, yes,*
> *Yes*
> *I cry*
> *as I read your words,*
> *full of feeling*

Sending pieces of myself across the pond
to Esther
and
up the highway
to Alys

A new journey begins
between us
Inside us
Through us
Sharing our vulnerabilities in response
to a provocation.

dust off dusty traditions, forge
move forward, writing
open up space, thinking
disrupt, doctoral discourses
sharing our stories, our voices
to story our journey. (Fitzpatrick & Fitzpatrick, 2015)

Alys: 20/07/2019

I'm reading Esther's and Katie's article I can't seem to read it clearly, the ideas
dancing in my mind.

I stop, jiggle my baby strapped to my front in a sling and realise my glasses are
covered …
In what, I am not totally sure.
I pull the cloth, tucked safely within my bra, ready for these little emergencies
And wipe the glass clean.
I breathe deep, slowly in time with the sleeping babe
And begin to connect to your words,
Old words in published articles, new words in present emails
The maze of words in my head waiting for a second to come out.

I, like Esther, used poetry in my thesis
But not in the same way
I wish I could have communicated by email with my supervisors so creatively
I felt

Prevented,
unsure,
sick of my continual battle for change.
*Although poetic, lyric words nestled their way into my PhD (*Mendus, *2017).*
The multiplicity of the voices of the Alys-we inspired by Tami Spry's
'autoethnographic-we'
spoke into my problem, my challenges with the current educational paradigm
One of these voices was Alys-the-future-parent
I now reflect on this process in a post voice

Alys-the-parent.
The rhizomatic nature of the writing of my thesis and thereby the rhizomatic
nature of my thinking, theorising and I argued my living continues today.

I got a scholarship in Freedom to Learn, but freedom was often rebuked.
Many disruptions, "openings to possibilities" happened throughout my PhD
Complex entanglements (see Barad; Deleuze) within a linear, constrained
experience.
I was a student of 2014–2017 on paper
But was I really
The dreaming of applying, the application and the waiting for it to begin
Then further back sharing autoethnographic stories of past of future
Beyond into 'things' that lived with me on my journey
The nomadology of writing a PhD, being a PhD student, researching, relation-
ships, visits, the laptop, the books, the pen on paper, living itinerantly as a van-
dweller, my constant moving and writing in different places.
The normativity of an outsider's view of a PhD life lived so differently.

Reading vivaciously in a sunlit hammock,
Tuscano, Italia, Aprile 2015.
*I consumed Carolyn Ellis' "Ethnographic 'I'" (*2004*)*
A calling to email her immediately
"Come to ICQI", she said …
Without blinking I bought my flight
Coming home.

Alys

Dawne: 20/07/2019

Wow, and good morning, Alys and Esther
I am writing now in response to reading your words, Alys
I respond emotionally to your words, Alys
There are standouts for me, I respond, full of feeling, full of emotion, I feel your
words as I read them, on the page, they jump out at me
Words worth exploring—playing with—on the page
Words like glow
Voices—model voice, ideal PhD student—ideal supervisor—ideal
academy—perhaps
Relational
Change
Communication—we are changed by our experiences
 the people we meet
 we will be changed by our—relationships
as we communicate, and, as we, Alys-Dawne-Esther-we together
like a rhizome, share the rhizomatic nature of our thinking, as we
Think through poetic voices—together, singularly—as we
share the-our-we-multiplicity of our voices
of our experiences of being
in and within—drawing we three closer together
culminating in an embodied experience of becoming
 t1`he ideal PhD student and supervisor.

I am reminded of a quotation by Ken Gale and Jonathan Wyatt (2009),
who reflected:

> We see our writing as both creating and containing multiple, interconnected
> assemblages [T]hink of our book as a BwO as an intensive nomadic inquiry
> in and through writing, which follows a logic of sense, working rhizomati-
> cally with sensation as a means of inquiry, transgression and creativity. (p. 8)

Dawne

We Moved from Email to Google Docs

Dawne:
Hello Esther, I have just read your and Katie's article, "*Disturbing the*
Divide: Poetry as Improvisation to Disorder Power Relationships in Research
Supervision."

Just wow, Esther!

> *You were so lucky to have Katie as your supervisor*
> *To have a supervisor*
> *being so open—so vulnerable*
> *being willing to share*
> *Collaborative research is risky …* (Fahey & Cunningham Breede, 2021)
> *the gift of relating*
> *To explore using poetry*
> *your journey*
> *and your relationship*
> *through the doctoral space*
> *Perhaps*
> *through our writing*
> *we can explore*
> *a similar journey*
> *As we crack through the wall to let the light in*
> *So, my dear Esther*
> *will you join Alys and myself,*
> *as we story our doctoral journey.*

Esther:

Kia ora Dawne (and Alys),

I am sitting here at my desk, tucked away in the corner of my bedroom, looking out at a grey, windy, damp sky refusing to believe in summer. Sitting there glumly inside and beyond the rainforest stamped hills, stubborn. I ponder over your words. Your gratefulness for my openness, my willingness for relationship, my vulnerability. I value your desire to know, to relate, to interrogate. But how well do you know me?

Opportunity to pursue a PhD

> *Late in life, after marriage, children, a teaching career,*
> *Working full-time as a lecturer.*
> *PhD while working full-time,*
> *Fulfilling the roles of wife, mother and sometime friend,*
> *Never easy. And*
> *I don't think I 'fulfilled' each or*
> *Any of those roles.*
> *A **massive** undertaking, and a **privilege**.*
> *First in family to graduate, High school,*
> *University, to get a degree, a PhD was,*
> *Well, a little out there.*
> *Not something my hell and brimstone Pentecostal White,*

Working class family envisaged for me.
Not on our cultural radar.

In a neoliberal university undergoing ongoing academic reviews, my colleagues and I live uncertain lives of job description and job retainment. A supervisor now of several doctoral students who dream of one-day-becoming-academic where the market for jobs shrinks every day. Why would anyone enter into, sign up to doing, a PhD today? You would have to be courageous. A professor friend once asked me, "How do you want to change the world?".

Ngā mihi, Esther

> **Alys:**
> To Esther and Dawne,
> "How do you want to change the world?" I sit here and also ponder. The Spring weather in Australia is hot, but there is a refreshing breeze. I have been out for a walk with Ginny (now fast asleep as I type) in the sling. I was feeling a bit down and needed nature to restore my balance. We have to move soon. We always seem to have to move; this time, the weeks are ticking by and we can't afford to live anywhere near where my partner works, not even in a tiny, one bed place. It seems silly I have a PhD and thereby feel some entitlement—I shouldn't be living on the breadline. My PhD led me on such a challenging route calling out the academy, hierarchy and grading. I have researched myself out of wanting a career in the ivory tower … yet soon I may need to dip my toes in … help house and feed us … but how can I do this and keep true to my principles … help to change the world (see Mendus, 2021)?
> What books, people or articles saved you in your PhD journeys?
> Alys :-)

We Moved Back to Using Personal Email Communication

Dawne: 27/10/2019

> Dear Esther and Alys,
> *OMG,*
> *My sincere apologies, Esther.*
> *I read your words,*
> *yes, I do not know you,*
> *in a sense, I feel I do,*

perhaps my projection,
I have responded to your warmth, your vulnerability, your openness.

I am drawn to it,
like a moth to a flame,
it is lovely to hear your positive experience
through your doctoral space, with Katie,
who you acknowledge as a friend.

Like you, Esther,
I was the first in my family,
to go to university,
to get a degree,
to go onto further university studies,
now venturing into the doctoral space.

so why have I signed onto doing a PhD, you may ask,
how do I want to change the world?
gosh, two huge questions,
I will do my best to respond,
So you may know me a little better.

I have completed 4 degrees,
before entering the doctoral space,
surrounded by people who have completed their PhD,
friends of mine, who I admire,
intelligent, resourceful, articulate, lovely individuals,

Who have made their mark on me,
I learned to love learning,
I learned to become who I am today.
They are, not all that I am,
have contributed in meaningful ways,
allowing me to have my voice,
credibility and integrity to
who I am, and who I want to be.

To answer your question,
how do I want to change the world?
by leaving my mark,
my visual art, my photography, my poetry, my writings, my voice,
to leave behind a trace of me for my family and friends as I traverse through
this living space.

And Alys,
You ask what books, people or articles have saved me?
as I transverse through my PhD Journey,
my bookshelves show my journey,
firstly nursing, I thrived, I excelled,
I burned out,

Gestalt therapy,
Groupwork and counselling,
Discovering there was more to my life journey I had dis-remembered,
So began my personal therapy journey,
With the 3 Ms: Michelle, Michael and Mark,
Who saw me fall, falter and get up again,
to grow and become who I am today.
Psychology, I fell in love
with systemic functional grammar and admired deeply the people
who mentored me,
who pushed me when I faltered,
Who let me cry when I needed to,
Let me learn, as people, as friends—Sue and Rhondda.

And dear Jill,
who has always been there for me,
known me through hard times, good times,
friend, mentor, teacher and academic.
30 years, we know each other well,
transverse the liminal space between us in caring and friendship.

Books I have read, and those I have crafted,
speak to my journey.

art, photography, linguistics, autoethnography and poetry.
hand-made prints I have made, artworks I have painted,

And my biggest joy is now,
finding my voice through autoethnography,
the people I have met,
like you, Alys, Esther, Anne and Stacy, Tony, David, Lisa, Caroline and Art,
Tami and Barry, Fetaui and the Iosefo family,
my dear friend Deb, collaborators on a paper, a conference and a book chapter,
nearly finished.

It remains a privilege,
I consider myself lucky, to be in this doctoral space, to be able to grow,
as I find and give voice.

Esther: 29/10/19

transverse the liminal space between us in caring and friendship

Caring and friendship. A tricky thing in research student-supervisor-relationships—I was lucky to have supervisors who cared and valued friendship. Would this work in a "fast-track-PhD culture"? Caring and friendship are significant to my supervision philosophy—"somebody to talk to, to depend on and rely on for help, support, and caring, and to have fun and enjoy doing things with" (Tillmann-Healy, 2003, p. 730). To respond to your question, Alys, a key poem is Steinbeck's "Like Captured Fireflies".

I've had many teachers who taught us soon forgotten things,
But only a few like her who created in me a new thing, a new attitude, a
new hunger.
I suppose that to a large extent I am the unsigned manuscript of that teacher.
What deathless power lies in the hands of such a person?
John Steinbeck (1955)

I appreciate Dawne the people you celebrate in your poem. My PhD was a collaboration with whānau (family), ghosts (Derrida/hauntology) and incredible colleagues. To celebrate the work of Richardson (1994, 2001, 2002), I wrote a poem to remember those who "haunt" our work. I kept being asked how can I be so brave?

'How can you be so brave?' asked another Doctoral student.
How can I be so brave?
Because Laurel said I could
Because Norman said I should
Because Derrida said 'Speak to the ghost'
Because Elliot painted a picture
Because Dorothy performed a play
'You see' I answer
'I am not brave,
I just wear a brave's shoes'. (White, 2016)

These are *some* of my ghosts. There are also my colleagues, such as Barbara Grant and her work on supervision. Grant described "pleasurable" and "satisfying" (Grant, 2003) supervisor-student relationships … "for imagining new, and better, possibilities for how to conduct ourselves as academics, as becoming-supervisors, in what is oftentimes conflicted and squeezed work-life" (p. 357). A key in Grant's work, in relation to Bishop (1996), was a whānau of interest. Whānau of interest acknowledges and creates space for wider networks of people and family members who contribute to the processes and relationships integral to a PhD.

Alys: 21/11/2019

We live close to some of the fires, and it has been so smokey. It has been a new experience to live somewhere where fire is a real threat to homes, life, wildlife and trees. We are still searching for houses, and Ginny has learnt to crawl, sit up by herself and say "Dada"; she is six months old. I write as she sleeps soundly next to me in the bed.

I pine for my own university based whānau
But I did not give the place a chance
I embodied the nomadology of my rhizomatic PhD, as a van-dweller,
Dipping in and out of Hull
That city in the NE of England, I did not get to know
Did not let myself know
The blue van, then the red van would trundle in most months
For a night or two
I never moved to the university town where I was awarded a scholarship for my PhD
I would just:
Park the van on university land (like Ken Ilgunas [2013] *did for his whole master's program in the States),*

Still in range of eduroam for some nocturnal research
Stealthily cook my dinner and make sure the kettle did not whistle too loud for a morning brew
Keeping quiet and out of the watchful eye of the night warden
Learning where the shower blocks were
But always being on time, prepared and ready for my supervisions.
I'm not really sure what my supervisors thought of me, except …
I couch-surfed once and described my hosts as "eccentric"
My main supervisor laughed
"You calling someone else eccentric!!"
I did not see my-itinerant-self as different but with hindsight I was
A loner within the academy
Studying without a base?
I argue I had a base. My van base. I had a desk and shelves of academic books in my van.
My abode
A "dwelling-in-motion" (Sheller & Urry, 2006).
This motion is a 'live method' as Back and Puwar *(2012) argued: "[It] requires researchers to work on the move in order to attend to the 'newly coordinated' nature of social reality"* (p. 29).
But I didn't have those wonderful colleagues in my department to debate and learn from
Maybe I held a rose-tinted-view of PhD student life
Or maybe I need to hold some responsibility for my actions, to choose to not live in Hull, not be part of the department, take the money and run, and write the PhD on the road, not in the university library.
I chose to be different; others do not get that choice.
International students must sign in daily.
I appeared as and when I wanted.
Creating my own PhD tapestry.
My poor supervisors did not have a chance.
I found my whānau-of-interest elsewhere; collecting key people around the UK and then the world, talismans of hope, inspiration and change.

Esther: 22/11/2019

Morena, Alys,

I love/am inspired by your nomadic PhD. In a different way to you, I too travelled, travelled oceans, travelled disciplines, travelled clichés of scholarly groups, listened, nodded, shook my head. I understood so much better through living in what Ingold (2009) described as a "meshwork" of

connections, as a wayfarer threading my way through the world, and finding knots on the landscape.

> *Knots of scholarly people*
> *Talismans of hope.*
> *An interactive pattern of knots*
> *Unifying metaphor of*
> *A researcher who*
> *Deliberately connects with others*
> *Across and along different 'thought' pathways*
> *Networks/committees/conferences*
> *A gathering of wayfarers.*
> *Ebb and flow,*
> *Varied gatherings,*
> *Yielding understanding of the lifeworld,*
> *Neither classified nor networked, but*
> *Meshworked* (Ingold, 2009, p. 41).
> *Complexity of 'texture', 'growth', 'movement',*
> *Woven into the fabric.*
> *A tangled mesh of interwoven complexly knotted strands*
> *Every strand is a way of life, and every knot a place* (Ingold, 2009, p. 37).
> *As scholars we travel and write collaboratively with our scholarly ghosts (*St. Pierre, 2014*), are dipping in and out of other worlds (*Lugones, *1987).*
>
> *Remembering always the*
> *Privilege of hearing and*
> *Being a part of a becoming*
> *Story of those we are always*
> *Travelling with present-absent-*
> *Knots in the terrain of a*
> *Shifting landscape.*

Alys's response to Dawne's image (see Fig. 12.1)

> *Talking to the picture*
> *Motility of motion*
> *Comic caricatures of life, the academy*
> *It could be us, Dawne, Esther and I*
> *Dancing to the light of the moon*
> *Our whanau-of-interest*
> *Or it could be me and my supervisors*
> *Their ghosts*

Fig. 12.1 We three, Dawne, Esther and Alys, engage across time and space (Dawne Fahey, gum bichromate print, 2019)

The hauntology of their words, their actions, their presence
Their support
Testing and teasing me from the sidelines
And me in the middle
Jumping
Bunny hopping
A bunny, its fluffy tail, paws and wild ears
Alice in Wonderland with the white rabbit
My eyes are drawn to the people, the foreground
But so much is going on in the background
The constantly changing environments
The nomadology of my van-dwelling in my PhD life
Esther's wayfaring and Dawne's artistic understandings
Are the tall lines poplar trees, church spires or the distortion of the image
Looking out through rain splatted glass?
Not only do I see this image, I feel it, embody it
Sway, cry and smile at the intensity of my PhD journey.

Esther—to my travelling companions

> *We are not alone.*
> *Look down at the path we tread*
> *At the footsteps of those*
> *Who have gone before.*
> *Their voices tucked inside*
> *The pile of books, papers, scribbled notes.*
> *Ghosts.*
>
> *Carolyn Ellis extends an invitation;*
> *Stacy Holman Jones and Dan Harris*
> *Make a place/home to gather;*
> *Tony Adams creates a venue to publish;*
> *Facebook family advise and share.*
> *A community of scholars.*
> *A whānau of interest.*
>
> *And so, we three dance*
> *Stretch our limbs into the space,*
> *Made for us and make it bigger.*
> *Ghosts guide us, encourage us,*
> *Shining a light onto our path. We*
> *Feel the presence of community,*
> *Of family, of each other, of the world.*
> *Supervisor, student, fellow autoethnographer,*
> *Artist, van dweller, researcher,*
> *Mother, friend, dancer.*
> *We are not alone.*

Dawne's response: Our—we, Alys, Esther and Dawne's—collaborative journey

> *Motion, dancing, bunny hopping,*
> *Down the pathway, headfirst, giving thanks,*
> *Crawling, running,*
> *Other times dragged along,*
> *Willingly, embodied, sprinting,*
> *Into the rabbit hole of the doctoral space,*
> *Across the miles of supervisory space.*

We journey together, singularly, collaboratively,
Being present, across absent writing spaces,
Rhizomatic, situating ourselves through our texts,
Dancing across page, across oceans,
Making, sharing, caring, locating,
Friendship, relationship, community
Scholars, student, artist, fellow autoethnographers.

Alys, Esther, me,
Rose-tinted glasses, nocturnal research,
Van-dwelling, in-motion, sheltering,
Privilege, purpose, becoming, centring,
Wayfaring through doctoral space,
Sometimes remembering, sometimes forgetting,
Ghostly landscapes enrapture.

Knotted, strands of power, respect and justice,
Calling out wrongs, standing tall, citing pleasures,
Like captured fireflies,
Literary minds, creative souls, mentoring,
Pain, progress, people showing us the way,
Emotions embodied deep,
We stand tall, proud and present in our writing.

Seeking to change the world,
Corporeal spaces embodying our texts,
Inspiring each other, in each other, and other,
Becoming, Affected,
Autoethnographic, narrative inquiry, arts-based research,
Books, articles, storying people and place,
Alys, Esther, me, together, challenging the neoliberal doctoral space.

Evoking Cooperman's notion of the corporeal "as spaces embodying our texts" that are most notably evident in the themes running through our collaboration (as cited in Capous-Desyllas & Morgaine, 2018) (see Fig. 12.2).
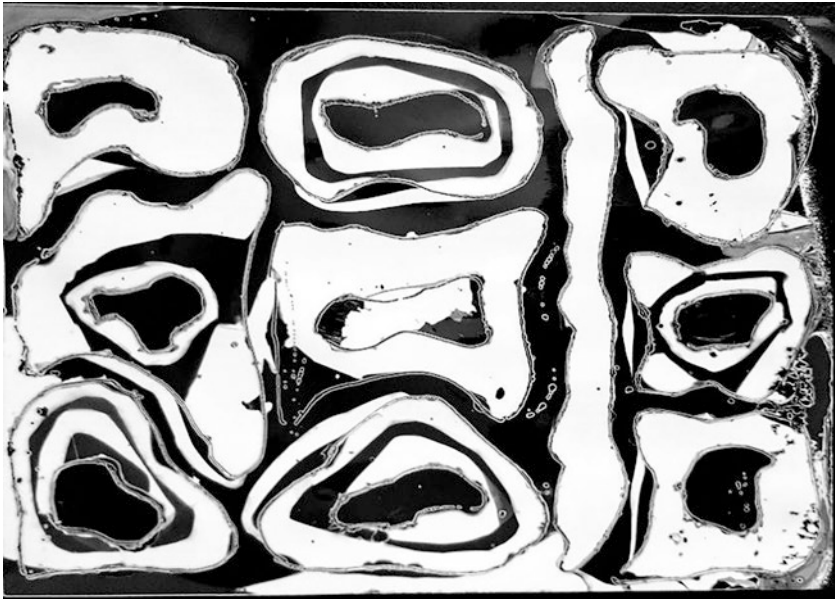
Fig. 12.2 Finding knots on the doctoral landscape (Esther Fitzpatrick, 2019) (Dawne Fahey, chemigram print, 2016)

Conclusion

Like Lord Byron (1788–1824) in his poetic masterpiece, *Don Juan*, we sought "to show things as they are, not as they ought to be" (Wright, 2006, p. 320). We have shared our vulnerabilities *cracking through the wall to let the light in*, re/storying our doctoral journeys and embarking on a collaborative journey using transgressive writing as a means of inquiry to deconstruct normative doctoral discourse. Our heartfelt stories traversed the liminal space between us, as our experiences unfolded on the page through our emails—sustaining our caring and friendship, creating knots. Collapsing time, we sailed back and forth across the vast space separating us. Sharing our friendship, moments of joy, laughter and family, we reflected on the challenges that we each faced from the increasingly neoliberal academy. And, as we pause at the end of this particular journey, we ponder, what strategies do we suggest for future doctoral students to continue disrupting doctoral practices and bring their own voice to the work?

Dear Reader,

Playing with words. We can get so caught up and haunted by what we assume that a PhD should look, sound and feel like. And this is true of the writing act also, often writing out (erasing) the life, the scent, the emotions of the work, into a formulaic, inaccessible, uninviting jargon-filled piece of work (Leavy, 2010). Jamie Burford (2017) argued that the emotional dimension is necessary. Laurel Richardson (1994, 2001, 2002) brought us back to the theoretical understanding and practice of writing as a method of inquiry. Write, write, write creatively, innovatively, towards meaning making (Fitzpatrick & Mullen, 2019). Write poetry (Faulkner, 2009), memoirs and conversations; take photos; paint a picture; perform a play; write the world; or even come dance your PhD (Mendus, 2019). A performance of deliberately plugging into creative making, into theory, into writing, to create a "living bod[y] of thought" (Holman Jones, 2016, p. 8). Let your scholarly ghosts (St. Pierre, 2014) sit at the table with you, in the corner of a coffee shop, and write the conversation into being. Let them argue with you. Argue back. Find your voice. And push the boundaries of what it means to write. Write through the body (Spry, 2011), let your senses be invited into the act of writing (Fitzpatrick & Longley, 2020). And write in collaboration with others, find a family, a whānau of interest, email, Google Docs, Facebook posts (e.g. the micro-macro project [Fitzpatrick, 2020]). Learn to be a serendipiter (Fitzpatrick, 2017) or an edge-dweller (Mendus, 2021), noticing and responding to the conversations that you hear, read and see through our interactions/intra-actions with the world. As demonstrated in this chapter, there is no one way to be a doctoral student. Just remember that you are not alone.

It is time for us to close. We encourage you all to travel, to reach out and find friends, to listen and speak with those who have gone before us, to create knots on the landscape, and write poetry. Doing a doctorate is never an easy thing, it's not meant to be, but it can be exciting, challenging or transforming and is always a privilege.

References

Back, L., & Puwar, N. (2012). A manifesto for live methods: Provocations and capacities. *The Sociological Review, 60*(1), 6–17. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2012.02114.x

Ball, S. (2012). Performativity, commodification and commitment: An I-Spy guide to the neoliberal university. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 60*(1), 17–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2011.650940

Bishop, R. (1996). *Collaborative research stories: Whakawhanaungatanga*. Dunmore Press. http://hdl.handle.net/10523/531

Burford, J. (2017). Conceptualising doctoral writing as an affective-political practice. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, *12*, 17–32. http://www.informingscience.org/Publications/3689

Capous-Desyllas, M., & Morgaine, K. (Eds.). (2018). *Creating social change through creativity: Anti-oppressive arts-based research methodologies*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Alta Mira Press.

Fahey, D., & Cunningham Breede, D. (2021). "Punctuation, pause, next slide, please": The risks of research and self-disclosure. In D. L. Mulligan & P. A. Danaher (Eds.), *Researchers at risk: Precarity, jeopardy and uncertainty in academia* (pp. 35–54). Palgrave Macmillan.

Faulkner, S. L. (2009). *Poetry as method: Reporting research through verse*. Left Coast Press.

Fitzpatrick, E. M. (2017). The bricoleur researcher, serendipity and arts-based research. *The Ethnographic Edge*, *1*(1), 61–73. http://www.tee.ac.nz/index.php/TEE/article/view/11

Fitzpatrick, E. M. (2020). #Plugging into hope. *Qualitative Inquiry*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800420960186

Fitzpatrick, E. M., & Alansari, M. (2018). Creating a warmth against the chill: Poetry for the doctoral body. *Art Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal, 3*(1), 10.18432/ari29368.

Fitzpatrick, E. M., & Fitzpatrick, K. (2015). Disturbing the divide: Poetry as improvisation to disorder power relationships in research supervision. *Qualitative Inquiry., 21*(1), 50–58. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414542692

Fitzpatrick, E. M., & Longley, A. (2020). Performative writing as a method of inquiry with the material world: The art of the imperative. *LEARNing Landscapes, 13*, 115–128. https://doi.org/10.36510/learnland.v13i1.1007

Fitzpatrick, E. M., & Mullen, M. (2019). Writing innovative narratives to capture the complexity of lived experience: Poetry, scriptwriting and prose. In S. Farquhar & E. Fitzpatrick (Eds.), *Innovations in narrative and metaphor: Methodologies and practices* (pp. 73–93). Springer.

Gale, K., & Wyatt, J. (2009). *Between the two: A nomadic inquiry into the collaborative writing and subjectivity*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Grant, B. M. (2003). Mapping the pleasures and risks of supervision. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 24*(2), 175–190. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300303042

Holman Jones, S. (2016). Living bodies of thought: The "critical" in critical autoethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 1, 10.177/1077800415622509–10.

Ilgunas, K. (2013). *Walden on wheels: On the open road from debt to freedom.* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Ingold, T. (2009). Against space: Place, movement, knowledge. In P. Wynn Kirby (Ed.), *Boundless worlds: An anthropological approach to movement* (pp. 29–43). Oxford, NY: Berghahn Books.

Le Fevre, D., & Sawyer, R. (2012). Dangerous conversations: Understanding the space between silence and communication. In J. Norris, R. D. Sawyer, & D. Lund (Eds.), *Duoethnography: Dialogic methods for social, health, and educational research* (pp. 261–287). Left Coast Press.

Leavy, P. (2010). A/r/t? A poetic montage. *Qualitative Inquiry, 12*(4), 240–243. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800409354067

Lugones, M. (1987). Playfulness, "world-traveling" and loving perception. *Hypatia, 2*(2), 3–19. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1987.tb01062.x

Mendus, A. (2017). *A rhizomatic edge-ucation: "Searching for the ideal school" through school tourism and performative autoethnographic-we.* PhD dissertation, University of Hull. https://hydra.hull.ac.uk/assets/hull:16594a/content

Mendus, A. (2019). An epilogue to two films: A cup of instant coffee—A vandwellers' assemblage and come dance my PhD. *Murmurations: Journal of Transformative Systemic Practice, 2*(1), 51–60. https://doi.org/10.28963/2.1.6

Mendus, A. (2021). Bad-Alys and the Bad-Folx: Edge-dwelling, hope and how to get your voice heard. *International Review of Qualitative Research, 14*(1), 55–66. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940844720968193

Norris, J., Sawyer, R. D., & Lund, D. (Eds.). (2012). *Duoethnography: Dialogic methods for social, health, and educational research.* Left Coast Press.

Prendergast, M. (2004, July). *Ekphrasis and inquiry: Artful writing on arts-based topics in educational research.* Paper presented at the 2nd international imagination in education research group conference, Simon Fraser University. http://www.ierg.net/pub_conf2004.php

Richardson, L. (1994). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. L. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 516–529). Sage.

Richardson, L. (2001). Getting personal: Writing-stories. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 14*(1), 33–38.

Richardson, L. (2002). Writing sociology. *Critical Studies—Critical Methodologies, 2*, 414–422. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390010007647

Sheller, M., & Urry, J. (2006). The new mobilities paradigm. *Environment and Planning A, 38*, 207–226. https://doi.org/10.1068/a37268

Spry, T. (2011). *Body, paper, stage: Writing and performing autoethnography*. Left Coast Press.

Steinbeck, J. (1955). Like captured fireflies. California Teachers' Association Journal, 51 (November).

St. Pierre, E. (2014). An always already absent collaboration. *Cultural Studies—Critical Methodologies, 14*(4), 374–379. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708614530309

Tillmann-Healy, L. (2003). Friendship as method. *Qualitative Inquiry, 9*(5), 729–749. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800403254894

White, J. (2016). *Permission: The international interdisciplinary impact of Laurel Richardson's work*. Sense.

Wright, P. (2006). *Selected poems of Lord Byron, including "Don Juan" & other poems*. Wordsworth Poetry Library.

Alone but Not Lonely: The Joys of Finding Your Online Doctoral Writing Tribe

Deborah L. Mulligan

Introduction

Doctoral writing is littered with academic highs and lows. These are to be expected and accepted as part of the process when striving for academic success. Following the data gathering and analysis, the write-up begins in earnest, and for many this may be a major stumbling point to completion. All the sacrifices of time, energy and money to reach this point culminate in the blank page staring (smirking?) from the computer screen. Tendrils of loneliness and uncertainty wrap their insidious fingers around the neurones in your brain. Imposter syndrome looms large. It's up to you—the doctoral student—to communicate your research in a meaningful, scholarly manner. Fewer than 50 per cent of Australians who begin a Doctorate in Philosophy (PhD) do not see it through to completion (Bednall, 2018). This is due to a range of factors, not the least of which may be doctoral

D. L. Mulligan (✉)
School of Education, University of Southern Queensland,
Toowoomba, QLD, Australia
e-mail: deborah.mulligan@usq.edu.au

213

loneliness. Write-up stage isolation and procrastination are huge barriers to doctoral achievement.

This chapter examines one particular strategy that I established to mitigate feelings of isolation during my first PhD thesis (Mulligan, 2018). My online writing tribe was invaluable to my wellbeing in terms of positionality and establishing my identity in the academic world. Whilst I was fortunate enough to have direct face-to-face access to various doctoral/academic individuals and groups within my university, it was my online writing community that supported me through those times when I could not or did not want to leave my home computer environs. When day wrote itself into night and early morning, I was alone but not lonely.

Sebastian Junger (2016) theorised that war veterans felt that they were social outcasts upon returning home from conflict zones because they could not find a tribe or a community in which to belong. To a minor and much less catastrophic degree, this is akin to the experiences of the lonely doctoral writer. A thesis write-up tests endurance and self-will. Original contributions to knowledge are a niche concept, shared by very few in a particular field of research and must be meticulously documented.

THE ISOLATION FACTOR

It is a truism that doctoral work requires long periods of solitary contemplation—*think time*. This is most particularly so during the write-up phase when the data have been collected, recorded and coded, and the literature review is finally (somewhat) under control. Now it gets *real*. Procrastination and imposter syndrome (Downie, 2016) loom large on the horizon. Now is the time when all of the elements of that precursory hard work combine and must take centre stage to be wrangled into a structured, coherent, academic thesis that hopefully addresses a knowledge gap (at least, in my case, it did when I started out all those years ago). As if to add more ingredients into an already overcrowded pressure cooker, the thesis must be presented in such a way as to enlighten and satisfy/interest experienced examiners who may be time poor and ready to find fault.

Ali and Kohun (2006) claimed: "The feeling of isolation among doctoral students is a major factor that contributes to the high attrition rate at doctoral programs" (p. 21). They further acknowledged that, although this is a recognised phenomenon, little has been done to counteract the effects of loneliness that doctoral students feel as they progress through

their study. "In other words, most programs do not include specific design features that help to handle this feeling" (p. 21).

It would seem that little has changed over the course of more than a decade and a half. Sibai et al. (2019) commented that 64 per cent of PhD candidates reported feelings of loneliness, with nearly half of the scholars surveyed citing it as a major mental health hazard. This is no small concern. Anderson (2016) posited: "To say that loneliness and isolation are big social problems is a dramatic understatement.… Isolation is a marauding terror slaying without discrimination or remorse" (n.p.). In the doctoral world, loneliness can mean the difference between a successful thesis and an abandoned failure (Bendemra, 2013).

Students may become academic hermits through a variety of reasons, but an online connection with other academics, no matter their topic area, can be a rejuvenating tonic that staves off mental health issues and nourishes intellectual wellbeing (Cervini, 2011). It is my contention that one of the major essential elements that determines achievement is a feeling of belonging (Mulligan, 2018). In other words, it is essential for doctoral students to seek out their tribe in the form of a community of like-minded others.

Tribal Salutogenesis

A writing tribe is composed of people with a shared ethic and a common goal. The environment in which they prosper is a salutogenic (McDonald, 2005) one that is both non-threatening and health promoting. It is one in which members feel comfortable to offer and receive knowledge and skills. This tribe is not all-consuming or obligatory, and scholars are entitled to a certain attendance transiency in that they are able to move in and out of the group at will. It is an organic, grassroots arrangement instigated by writers, for writers, who wish to share tragedies, triumphs and time with one another. Effective writing tribes ignore ethnic, age, gender and other cultural labels. The ethos of *We're all in this together* is a pervasive clarion call to those in need of scholarly company and socio-psychological wellbeing.

Benefits of an Online Writing Tribe

The complexity of the doctoral write-up is multilayered. The loneliness of the doctoral student, especially during the most creative of stages—that of the write-up—can be particularly acute. It is not simply the social separation that can add to the loneliness whirlpool. Students may experience a matrix of multiple forms of isolation. These may include geographical, cultural, psychological and disciplinary issues where the student's topic is highly specialised and where the student does not have the benefits of direct access to a university campus and other academic support.

Enter the inclusive world of digital scholarship in the form of the academic online writing group. Veletsianos and Kimmons (2012) referred to a "networked participatory scholarship" whereby academics participate in "online social networks to share, reflect upon, critique, improve, validate, and otherwise develop their scholarship" (p. 768).

My particular online writing tribe was an academic community group formed from a social media Facebook page called the "Older Wiser Learners" (Owls, 2015). This group was created by an older woman who reached out for companionship/wisdom from her academic peers during her PhD journey. It now has a varied and changing list of fellow doctoral student volunteer moderators. Whilst the Facebook page is currently listed as having approximately 3200 members, the side messenger writing group membership is fluid as people move in and out as their needs arise.

It should be noted that our subject topics varied widely, as did our individual approaches to the composition of how we wished to spend our time. Not everyone was at the final stage of their thesis. Some were just beginning their literature review, but most, like myself, were in the endurance phase of wrangling sentences into paragraphs into cohesive chapters into a solid and authentic piece of scholarly art. Additionally, some were just beginning their write-up, while others were much further along. Wherever they were positioned in the doctoral journey, all were welcomed.

The structure of the writing day (and night) was based on a pomodoro writing technique whereby we wrote for three quarters of an hour and then took a break for a quarter of an hour. The latter consisted of social chat time for some (most) or private time for others. A missed break usually signalled that the writing was intense for that individual and, as such, that their concentration was not to be disturbed with targeted messages to them specifically. The break also afforded the opportunity for some moderate stretching/exercise in order to release pressure on the body from an

intense period of sustained and lengthy sedentary behaviour. I tried not to miss the chat breaks as I found them intellectually refreshing. They also offered social connection in an otherwise disconnected and isolated world.

Rutledge (2011) argued that pivotal to the interactive and dynamic nature of human personality is the need for group belonging, especially in today's digital and social media-focused world. Significantly, she raised the issue of the crucial role of social connection as an enduring legacy of the human condition. She posited that it was necessary when hunting for food in prehistoric times, and that it remained a fundamental survival technique in our complex contemporary societies: "Connection is a prerequisite for survival, physically and emotionally" (n.p.).

Building on Rutledge's (2011) insights, I have created a conceptual framework around which the rest of this chapter is based. Figure 13.1 represents what I consider to be the essential elements of an effective writing group. With entrée into a situation that innately fosters a sense of connection and belonging, a person is enabled to establish effective peer relationships; to build structure into the writing day (and night); to partake in opportunities for informal learning and skill acquisition; and to enact autonomous learning. These elements, of course, could apply to both on- and off-line writing interactions.

Fig. 13.1 Essential elements of an online writing group: A conceptual framework
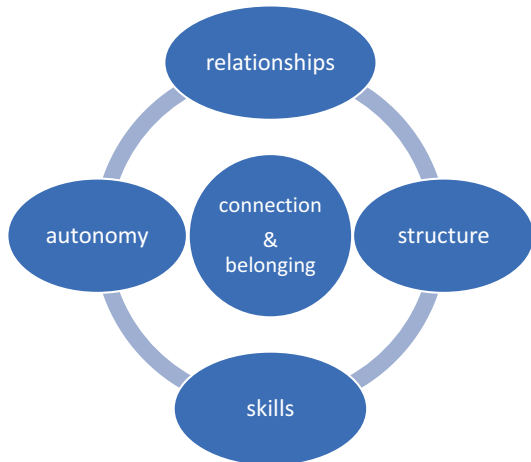
CONNECTION AND BELONGING

In his influential article "A Theory of Human Motivation", Maslow (1943) hypothesised that healthy human beings have a certain number of needs that motivate their behaviour. He acknowledged the notion of belonging in the third tier of his influential "hierarchies of pre-potency" (p. 370), or what we now refer to as the hierarchy of needs. Australian researchers Earle and Fopp (1999) hypothesised a "Universal Needs" (p. 389) theory that included a sense of belonging. Neuroscientist Dr Nicole Gravagna (2018) published an updated list of six human needs. These included "food, water, shelter, sleep, others and novelty" (n.p.). The first four needs on her list are self-explanatory. She further claimed that connection with others was a prerequisite for the release of specific hormones such as oxytocin that are necessary to sustain a sense of positivity. Lastly, Gravagna posited that, when we try a new learning opportunity, dopamine, another wellbeing chemical, is released into our brains, thus creating a "healthy sense of well-being" (n.p.).

The duality of connectedness and belongingness constitutes the decisive universal elements of the success of any group interaction, including that of an academic writing group. In the doctoral world, strong connections help students to develop professional identity, and to provide opportunities for social support and informal learning. Bednall (2018) claimed that successful postgraduate students tended to perceive themselves as competent and were intrinsically motivated. I would place a qualifier on this to include the caveat that successful students are open to circumstances in which to connect with fellow students to increase their mental health and academic output.

Fig. 13.2 Relationship elements of an online writing group
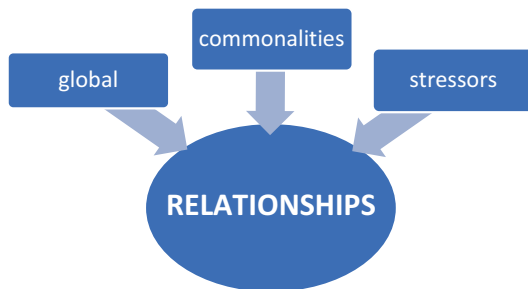
Online Writing Groups Offer Opportunities to Establish Effective Peer Relationships

Figure 13.2 refers to the elements that constitute the peer relationships that can be established in effective online writing groups. Global relationships expand our personal and academic horizons. Through this knowledge expansion, we revel in our commonalities, and we share the stressors of daily/nightly writing life.

Positive peer relationships create a feeling of connectivity through shared lived experience. Fellow students are better suited to understanding the minutiae of living with a thesis than are supervisors who are consulted periodically. Peer networks complement, and may at times exceed, supervisory guidance. A stable online writing group can offer spontaneous counselling or advice as problems occur during the writing rather than waiting for the next session with the supervisor. This is invaluable for supporting a student to enter the research community, and, in doing so, it generates a feeling of belonging. "As such, knowledge as well as identity are socially constructed in the PhD" (Mantai, 2017, p. 638).

Mantai (2017) also claimed: "Social relationships promote degree progress and improve the PhD experience" (p. 638). This was certainly true of my online writing experience. During my thesis write-up, I was lucky enough to be joined by a global core group of writers (about ten individuals) who checked in regularly. We were geographically quite distant and spread throughout the northern and southern hemispheres. It was a privilege to learn about life in different time zones during our break periods. It was also immensely comforting to know that company and companionship were a mainstay in the early or late hours of the day and night. I reside in Australia, and I occasionally began my writing day between 3 am and 4 am. Students from the northern hemisphere were there writing alongside me. Similarly, if I wrote past midnight and on into the early witching hours, I was in good company. One of my peers in New York wrote around her working day, and so would appear at random times of my day.

It was fascinating to hear about the various political climates and how they affected professional and personal lifestyles. We heard about the impact of shooting rampages from those who were the closest and the most directly affected. Weather was a regular topic of conversation as England suffered through an intense and unseasonable heat wave. We celebrated international holidays by changing the emoji that indicated the

beginning and the end of each writing session. For example, on 4 July (United States Independence Day), we changed our emoji to the United States flag; on 26 January (Australia Day), we employed the Australian flag; and on 1 August (Australian national thoroughbred horses' birth-day), a horse accompanied our writing sessions.

At times, we hit a sweet spot and we were all writing and, in break time, messaging, at the same time. The chat was frenetic as we all attempted to talk over the top of one another. It was easy to lose the thread of the original conversation, but somehow we all knew which comment was directed to whom.

I learnt a lot about how a doctorate is constructed in other countries—and even in other Australian universities. It allowed me an international comparison of university life and of the advantages and disadvantages of various systems and policies around the world. I was also privy to the ongoing narrative from one of the students who lived in Africa and whose supervisor was located in northern Europe. Such a situation was beyond my comprehension, and I waited for the next instalment of her academic travails and triumphs.

As my group was an offshoot of a Facebook page set up for doctoral students over 40 years of age, most of the group upon which I happened initially was made up of over 40- to 50-year-olds. For a period of time, I was the only member over 60. Age was not a barrier—we were all on a serious academic journey. Some of us were at the early thesis stages, some of us were about to submit, and one of us had been conferred and was writing journal articles from her PhD. The writing was intense and purposeful.

We were all trying to fit in the demands of a doctorate around our family life. It was affirming to realise that, no matter the country, we shared common issues around thesis writing and family tensions. There was a certain advantage to our relative anonymity as we could vent about our problems with no repercussions or fear of exposure. Counsel was provided freely and with good intent.

One of the more delightful and beneficial discoveries that I made was that of our shared sense of humour. This was a bonus in grim times when the writing was faltering, and deadlines were not being met. It was an absolute joy to share a joke and/or to laugh about the absurdities of the sacrifices that we were making to achieve a goal for which very few people aimed. This was a salve to our mental health stressors and buoyed us through the lonely hours.

Geographical isolation can be one factor in a raft of pressures. As well as physical isolation, typically your family/friends do not understand your drive to complete and publish your research, or even why you have begun the journey in the first place. The effort and time that the doctoral student expends can be anathema to others, particularly if they observe at close hand the issues involved in completion and the mental (and, at times, physical) stress involved in the process. It is affirming to belong to a tribe of peers who strive for the same goal, and who understand the unrelenting processes and pressures required for fulfilment.

Online Writing Groups Offer Opportunities to Build Structure

Figure 13.3 depicts the manner in which online writing groups offer opportunities to build structure into the routine of writing. This structure aids in providing routine to your day and in planning your writing strategies, and can also add context to your life as a doctoral student.

Academic growth is solely dependent on the effort that the student exerts. Universities can sometimes present systemic difficulties and road-blocks through restructuring issues, unsuccessful collaborations, inadequate workspaces and so forth. The online writing group exists apart from these pressures and provides structure in an otherwise unstable writing environment. This instability and uncertainty have even more contemporary currency as I write this chapter during the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant enforced physical and academic isolation of students globally.

Building structure into your writing day can ensure a positive routine, and can act as a mitigating agent against procrastination. The knowledge that there are others who will welcome you into the daily (nightly)

Fig. 13.3 Structural elements of an online writing group
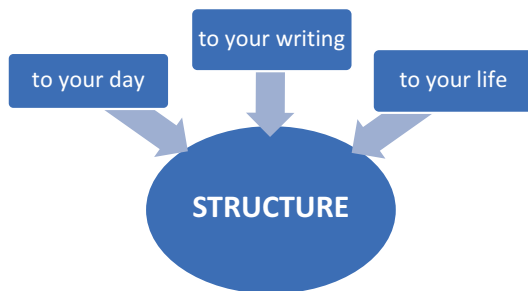
write-up sessions engenders a sense of responsibility to care for others who may be staving off loneliness. Generally, the members of my writing tribe were greeted with someone posing the question: "What are you going to do today?" In other words: *how are you going to spend your time?* This was asked not as a tool for a formalised reporting, but out of genuine interest from the group. Whether it be reading some topic related articles or wrestling a chapter into a cohesive text, putting your goal onto the page ('speaking' to it) can focus the mind and create decisive action. This orientation seeped its way into our psyche and acted as a catalyst of thought before entering the writing space. Instead of being prompted to verbalise our goal, we had formulated the structure of the next few hours prior to engagement with the group.

Writing requires us to be centred and organised. The routine break imposed by the pomodoro afforded the opportunity to chat voluntarily about our progress and to discover how others deal with delays and/or unexpected detours in their writing/research. This shared time served as a balm to the anxiety of thinking that we were alone in our frustrations with the process and in our feelings of hopelessness. Routines can be soothing, but knowing that we were able to live in the moment and to continue writing as the muse was upon us added a freedom and a form of security in that we knew that, when we were ready to rejoin the group, we were able to do so seamlessly and we would be welcomed back into the fold.

Routines can be an important aspect of a doctoral life. There are pressure points to progress from all stakeholders, including the university, the supervisory team and yourself. Membership of an online writing tribe aids in establishing certain habit-forming efficiencies that can ease stress and allow the student to focus on the bigger picture. Routines can help to save time, lessen the need to plan, increase proficiency and momentum, prioritise important tasks, decrease procrastination and engender self-confidence (Naidu & Naidu, 2016).

Online Writing Groups Offer Opportunities for Informal Learning and Skill Acquisition

Figure 13.4 synthesises how writing groups can provide multiple opportunities for informal learning and skill acquisition. This includes academic skills as well as personal skill building in the form of interpersonal

Fig. 13.4 Skill acquisition elements of an online writing group

academic

everyday

interpersonal

SKILLS
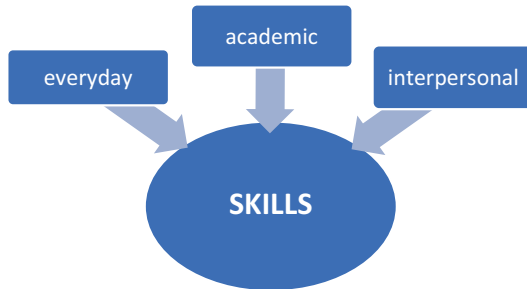
communication, which may become stunted during the doctoral journey where the student is so heavily focused on the singular target of research output.

Informal learning is "unstructured and organic" (Golding et al., 2009, p. 53) and, as such, its significance is undervalued in the rigid academic environment. However, this type of communication is crucial when problem solving various decisions upon which basic doctoral functionality depends is important. Discussion about the pros and cons of utilising various academic coding and referencing resources was useful for those of us who were just starting out, as well as those of us who were experiencing issues whilst using a particular tool. Members happily provided off-the-cuff mentoring for those in need.

Critical friends existed to discuss one another's work occasionally. Only the small writings such as an outline for an abstract or a particular paragraph were appraised. Time did not permit a deeper dive into someone else's composition. Suggestions for the formulation of text for a peer experiencing writer's block were forthcoming, and each of us took an interest in the progress of the individuals within the group. We celebrated the writing of a good sentence and the submission of a thesis in equal measures. We supported one another no matter how small or large the endeavour. Progress was our ultimate goal.

Doctoral life promotes a certain disconnect from the people around us who do not understand our research or our passion/focus. Interpersonal skills can be sacrificed in the pursuit of an original contribution to research requiring total focus and dedication. Conversational gambits can provide unwitting opportunities that reflect your research fervour. The innocent and seemingly simple question posed by a friend, relative or acquaintance "How's your research going?" can become a two-hour discourse on the

highs and lows of fieldwork, the intricacies of theoretical frameworks or any number of mind numbing (for your non-academic audience) topics.

ONLINE WRITING GROUPS OFFER OPPORTUNITIES TO ENACT AUTONOMOUS LEARNING

Figure 13.5 refers to the elements of autonomous learning that promote a sense of control, agency and identity. In this context, control is considered within the notion of the student's ownership over her writing. Autonomy fosters self-efficacy in the enactment of individual responsibility. Academic identity is forged through a greater sense of self-reliance and skill development.

Doctoral advancement is predicated on the assumption that students will accept ownership of their acquisition of knowledge and control the manner in which it is best communicated to the rest of the world. Over and above raw intelligence, doctoral success lies in students' ability to control their own learning and research in a timely manner; believe in themselves and practise self-efficacy in their ability to direct their research; and develop an authentic and empowering researcher identity. Each of these attributes is reliant on the student's mastery of autonomous learning and intrinsic motivation. Students are encouraged to be dynamic and enthusiastic agents in their own academic journeys. This is difficult at the outset and can leave students floundering in a mire of imposter syndrome and loneliness. Online writing groups can provide an opportunity for discussion with researchers who are more advanced in their thesis production.

The internationally respected academic vlogger Professor Tara Brabazon (2020) encouraged students to seek out or create "energetic connection points" where they make a commitment (to themselves and/or to others)

Fig. 13.5 Autonomous learning elements of an online writing group
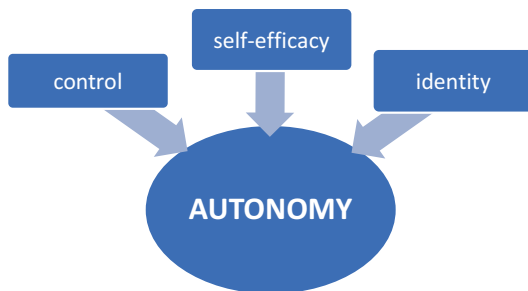
to attend regularly and to involve themselves actively within the group context. Ultimately, the student's knowledge exceeds that of the supervisor/s (Peelo, 2011, p. 159). This is understandable to the extent that doctoral research is original and specialised. Batty et al. (2020) referred to the benefits for students who broaden their networks beyond the supervisory team, and who seek collaboration with others. Sharing ideas and requesting the opinion of trusted others who are not invested in your topic build self-efficacy and have productive outcomes both in mental health and in scholarship.

Conclusion

Approximately 1.1 per cent of the world's population aged between 25 and 64 years has a PhD. The ratio of female to male PhD recipients in Australia is roughly equal, with females slightly lower than males. This is not the case in many Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations where males constitute a markedly higher proportion of PhD students (Coldron, 2021). I am happy to say that I make up a part of that small percentage. I am proud of my academic achievement.

Doctoral students who are "active rather than passive agents of learning" (Mantai, 2017, p. 638), and who are self-directed, demonstrate best practice in the form of skill acquisition through the groups that they join. Extant literature provides information about the advantages and disadvantages of writing collaboratively in a face-to-face group in a university setting (Brower, 2021; Johnson, 2018), but there is little information about participating in an academic online writing community where members have their own individual projects but are working towards the same goal—that is, that of a doctorate.

Finally, there's this—the ultimate affirmation of belonging to a tribe—a shared sense of fulfilment and academic companionship in a group that *gets it*. They understand the challenges of completing an authentic and rigorous thesis. Belonging is a fundamental human need. We do not/ should not exist in a social vacuum. Finding an enthusiastic writing tribe mitigates feelings of loneliness, increases wellbeing, and promotes a love of learning and a sense of purpose.

References

Ali, A., & Kohun, F. (2006). Dealing with isolation feelings in IS doctoral programs. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 1,* 21–33. doi: 10.28945/58

Anderson, R. (2016, April). The perils of isolation—both social and academic. *The Careers Blog.* https://blog.jobs.ac.uk/all-things-research/the-perils-of-isolation/

Batty, C., Owens, A., Brien, D. L., & Ellison, E. (2020). 1 in 5 PhD students could drop out. Here are some tips for how to keep going. *The Conversation.* https://theconversation.com/1-in-5-phd-students-could-drop-out-here-aresome-tips-for-how-to-keep-going-131902

Bednall, T. C. (2018, July 13). PhD completion: An evidence-based guide for students, supervisors and universities. *The Conversation.* https://theconversation.com/phdcompletion-an-evidence-based-guide-for-students-supervisors-and-universities-99650

Bendemra, H. (2013, October). Doing a PhD can be a lonely business but it doesn't have to be. *The Conversation.* https://theconversation.com/doing-a-phd-can-be-a-lonely-business-but-it-doesnt-have-to-be-19192

Brabazon, T. (2020). Solitude and connectivity: Writing through change [Vlog 210]. *YouTube.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AekJ78eh1C0

Brower, T. (2021, January 10). Missing your people: Why belonging is so important and how to create it. *Forbes.* https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracy-brower/2021/01/10/missing-your-people-why-belonging-is-so-important-and-how-to-create-it/?sh=4b40de517c43

Cervini, E. (2011, August). Lonely PhD student? Just log in. *The Age.* https://www.theage.com.au/education/lonely-phd-student-just-log-in-20110808-1iixu.html

Coldron, A. C. (2021, March 18). How rare (or common) is it to have a PhD? *Find a PhD.* https://www.findaphd.com/advice/blog/5403/how-rare-or-common-is-it-to-have-a-phd

Downie, J. (2016, March). The lies we tell ourselves. *The Thesis Whisperer.* https://thesiswhisperer.com/2016/03/09/the-lies-we-tell-ourselves/

Earle, L., & Fopp, R. (1999). *Introduction to Australian society: A sociological overview* (3rd ed.). Harcourt Brace.

Golding, B., Brown, M., & Foley, A. (2009). Informal learning: A discussion around defining and researching its breadth and importance. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 49*(1), 34–56. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ864431.pdf

Gravagna, N. (2018, February 5). Six fundamental human needs we need to meet to live our best lives. *Quora.* https://www.forbes.com/sites/quora/2018/02/05/six-fundamental-human-needs-we-need-to-meet-to-live-our-best-lives/?sh=2306560d344a

Johnson, E. M. (2018). The doctoral writing conversation: Establishing a generic doctoral writing programme. *Open Review of Educational Research, 5*(1), 16–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/23265507.2017.1419439

Junger, S. (2016). *Tribe: On homecoming and belonging.* Fourth Estate Publishers.

Mantai, L. (2017). Feeling like a researcher: Experiences of early doctoral students in Australia. *Studies in Higher Education, 42*(4), 636–650. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2015.1067603

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review, 50*(4), 370–396. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346

McDonald, J. J. (2005). *Environments for health: A salutogenic approach.* Earthscan. http://handle.uws.edu.au:8081/1959.7/11093

Mulligan, D. L. (2018). *"Time to find a new freedom": TOMNET and Men's Sheds—meeting older men's contributive needs in regions within South East and South West Queensland, Australia?* Unpublished Doctor of Philosophy thesis, University of Southern Queensland, Australia.

Naidu, D., & Naidu, D. (2016). 18 reasons why a daily routine is so important. *Skilled at Life.*

Older Wiser Learners. (2015). *PhD Owls—Older, Wise Learners.* [Facebook page]. https://www.facebook.com/groups/708019069302386

Peelo, M. (2011). *Understanding supervision and the PhD.* Continuum International Publishing Group.

Rutledge, P. B. (2011, November 8). Social networks: What Maslow misses. *Psychology Today.* https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/positively-media/201111/social-networks-what-maslow-misses-0

Sibai, O., Figueiredo, B., & Ferreira, M. C. (2019, January). Overworked and isolated: The rising epidemic of loneliness in academia. *The Conversation.* https://theconversation.com/overworked-and-isolated-the-rising-epidemic-of-loneliness-in-academia-110009

Veletsianos, G., & Kimmons, R. (2012). Networked participatory scholarship: Emergent techno-cultural pressures toward open and digital scholarship in online networks. *Computers and Education, 58*(2), 766–774. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2011.10.001

A Doctoral Experience from a Multicultural and Multidisciplinary Perspective

Paola R. S. Eiras and Henk Huijser

Introduction

This chapter engages with a multicultural and multidisciplinary perspective on the identity construction of a doctoral scholar (the first author). Many of the accounts and reflections have been kept in the form of journaling during her doctoral studies, which culminated in an overall process of personal and academic change, and which has provided the data on which the reflections in this chapter are based. Different experiences have allowed the deconstruction of the first author's Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) experience, generating numerous strategies to negotiate power relationships with supervisors (including the second author), and sociocultural positioning within the larger academic community in a transformative process of becoming. The chapter is dialogical in nature, with a

P. R. S. Eiras (✉)
Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark
e-mail: paola.eiras@edu.au.dk

H. Huijser
Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, QLD, Australia

reflection on the doctoral trajectory by a doctoral candidate interspersed with critical responses by a doctoral supervisor, both couched in a Critical Discourse Analytical framework (Fairclough, 2013). The first part provides her account that led to her PhD trajectory, including the research design and the negotiation of her identity in this process. Although the chapter is chronologically organised, the experiences and processes were not linear, and the reflections and analyses draw on relevant literature throughout the chapter before concluding with suggested directions for future research into the doctoral candidature process.

DOING A PHD

Setting the Scene

As a mature-aged student, my route to a PhD in the social sciences was not a direct one for two main reasons: firstly, my educational formation started in the natural sciences; and secondly, I have been a transnational[1] student and mobile academic for nearly 15 years. Such a multidisciplinary and multicultural perspective (e.g., by living and working in four continents thus far) has shaped both my personal identity and my academic trajectory. I am originally from Brazil, and I have been an Australian citizen for ten years now. I started my transnational experience as a student of veterinary medicine when I first moved to the United Kingdom in 1995. This first experience abroad as a student not only furthered my research and academic skills but also widened my worldviews—other people, and diverse cultures and languages. Different cultural, study and work experiences since then have allowed the deconstruction of my educational background, and they have shaped a varied career from biomedicine to the social sciences today. I have engaged in academic research since the early stages of my undergraduate studies in the natural sciences, which has shaped my first ontological views of the world and how knowledge can be created— for example, through a positivist lens (Moon & Blackman, 2014).

---

[1] While legally defined as an "international" student/academic, framed by study/work regulations founded in nationality, I define myself as a transnational student/academic in a multicultural/multilingual sense. By this, I mean that living and working in four continents thus far have shaped both my personal and my academic identities in a way that cannot be constrained or defined by national borders.

In this context, as a non-native English speaker, but having been taught the language since an early age and using literature in English to complete my first degree in veterinary medicine in Brazil, I was eager to converge my knowledge in biomedicine and languages as a career prospect. This was when I decided to start teaching English in medicine, which was in high demand amongst those wishing to embark on an academic career in the natural sciences in Brazil. This also led to a position as a translator for the Brazilian Ministry of Health, for which a background in biomedicine and English language proficiency were required. At that stage, I wanted to find a way in which I could "formalise the marriage" between medicine and English in academic writing practices within the social sciences, so I decided to undertake a master's degree by research (MA) in Linguistics, focusing on English for Specific Purposes. The first research experience in the humanities provided me with a different ontological foundation (Moon & Blackman, 2014) that allowed me to emancipate methodological approaches through which social phenomena of existential reality are explored. This positioning change, my cultural identity and factors associated with my personal and professional experiences in intercultural spaces have all influenced the way that I conducted research, which is often predicated on how we think about and live in the world. For instance, learning how I could design research methodologies with a multidimensional approach—that is, moving from a biological to cultural and psychological dimensions—meant that I later had to challenge paradigms (e.g., constructionism, realism and subjectivism) (Moon & Blackman, 2014) in established disciplines in my doctoral studies. While reflecting on how an epistemological position taken by the investigator affects the knowledge produced (Morin, 2008), I was also challenging my very existence and how I perceived and connected to the world, which of course is also an important part of a PhD experience. Meanwhile, as a practising language instructor (English and Portuguese as foreign languages), I was in a constant self-reflecting process that has shaped my teaching practices. In a string of work/life twists and turns in the following years, and while navigating diverse epistemological and ontological positions from the natural sciences to the humanities when undertaking research, associated with language teaching/learning, I decided to move to Australia, where I continued pursuing self-development (e.g., immersing myself in multicultural societies) and an academic career. As an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teacher, I worked in Australia, which eventually led to an opportunity of teaching EAP in China.

My professional experience, as a transnational academic (Brazilian/Australian, non-native English speaker, learner of Mandarin Chinese, living in China), has enabled me to develop a wide range of academic (e.g., learning/teaching approaches and methods), linguistic (e.g., English, Portuguese, Spanish and basic Mandarin Chinese) and cultural (e.g., communicative competence) skills. At the same time, it has always raised a series of questions about my own personal identity. Negotiating these in diverse environments is not an easy task—for example: "Are you Brazilian or Australian? How long have you lived in Australia?", and "How can a Brazilian be teaching English in a British university in China?". In this sense, I have often needed not only to legitimise my professional position but also to come to terms with the fact that I was increasingly feeling disconnected from geographical places, the longer that I have lived abroad, and the more that I have become exposed to diverse cultures. The question "Where are you from?" is a constant in my life, and does not have a straightforward answer because I do not have a place identity, and I am very aware that everything that I bring to both the classroom and my own world is permeated by different countries, languages, cultures and peoples with which and whom I have come to live and learn. The PhD trajectory later consolidated this kaleidoscopic identity in a positive manner, but not without challenges as it reinforced how knowledge and qualifications are still colonised by dominant anglophone cultures. For instance, my choice to undertake a PhD in the United Kingdom was a conscious one, and, in a way, I acknowledge that by, making this choice, I was reinforcing a particular academic culture. The perceived quality of a "British PhD", in my mind, could lessen people's doubt about both my qualifications and my capacity to engage in a long-term academic career. However, apart from my concern about where to undertake a PhD, I have always thought that a doctoral degree was about knowledge co-construction and identity transformation, which inadvertently fall into dominant discourses in academia—swimming upstream is a complex endeavour.

The PhD experience, for both candidate (first author) and supervisor (second author), who in this case shares a multicultural and multilingual background with the candidate, can thus be highly complex and contradictory, and it involves a certain amount of buying into discourses about the benefits of completing a PhD that are not always supported by a strong evidence base (Sverdlik et al., 2018). For example, there is an often unquestioned assumption that a PhD is the next logical step to further a scientific or an academic career, and that it is therefore inherently a

practical educational choice (Jenkins, 2020). This is an even stronger factor for academic staff who become doctoral candidates (while often holding down a full-time job simultaneously). Yet, at the same time, an increasing number of PhD graduates actually leave academia to pursue careers in other sectors (Passaretta et al., 2019). Such discourses underlie the variety of reasons why candidates start a PhD. Brailsford's study (2010) allowed him to categorise the motivations behind beginning a PhD as follows: employment and career considerations; personal motivations, including achieving the highest form of education available; and influence of friends, family, colleagues and academics/teachers. Of course, these are often related in complex ways, but the main point is that they draw on common discourses about the value of education and achievement, which, in turn, are not value-neutral but often culturally specific.

It is important to recognise in this context that as "global citizens" both authors have been in a privileged position that afforded them a certain amount of choice around the notion of global citizenship (Tarozzi & Torres, 2016)—in particular, the ability to travel physically and to study in different countries, and to be able to obtain visas and to raise finances to do so, but not without challenges. This is an often-unacknowledged privilege, but one that is nevertheless closed to many people across the globe. A related privilege is access to the types of educational opportunities that ultimately create the option to undertake a PhD. In an international context, the ability to speak and write sound English creates another layer of privilege in this respect. Again, this is not to say that this is a straightforward process, as there are many and complex layers of privilege. For example, within the Anglophone world, there are numerous structural barriers in place, including financial barriers, that relate to people from "other" systems and for whom English is not their first language. Overall, while we acknowledge these complex layers that affect decision-making in the first instance, and that require some to struggle a lot more than others, this does not detract from the very real challenges that characterise the doctoral journey itself, as the first author's continuing reflection shows.

The trajectory between my Master's degree and the decision to undertake a PhD took 13 years: I completed a Master of Arts in Linguistics by Research in 2004 in Brazil, I continued teaching EAP as a mobile academic for 10 years in Australia and China, and then I started my doctoral studies in 2017 in the United Kingdom. At a point where both my constant pursuit of self-development and my interest in contributing knowledge about cultural identities (culture defined here as a way of life that

includes education [Williams, 1958]) converged, I decided to undertake my doctoral studies. Concerning my research topic choice, I could relate to, and was puzzled by, how my own undergraduate Chinese students made sense of themselves as Chinese youth and higher education (HE) students in a Westernised "bubble" in their home country. Chinese peoples do not constitute a monolithic culture, but are rather embedded in broad intracultural and linguistic diversity. My PhD research is a qualitative exploration of cultural identity constructions of Chinese students in a transnational university in mainland China within the discipline of Sociology.

Once a decision is made to undertake a PhD, the candidate obtains a different status, which has implications for her professional identity. It is no coincidence therefore that the literature on doctoral education is rich in metaphors, as Gravett (2021) recently identified. Thus, a doctorate is often described as a "pathway, journey or trajectory, a rite of passage, or a liminal space" (p. 293). In this way, doctoral candidates are seen as "undertaking a crossing or boundary zone" (p. 293). While these are all spatial metaphors, they also suggest a linear journey towards a fixed endpoint, "from student to academic, from novice to expert" (p. 293). Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of rhizome and becoming, Gravett (2021) argued that such discourses of linearity are inadequate to capture the irregularity, fluidity and messiness of doctoral studies. In other words, "doctoral students can be understood as experiencing multiple and ongoing becomings, evolving and changing throughout a doctorate and beyond" (Gravett, 2021, p. 294). This also reflects the challenge of finding appropriate supervision and confronting the dominant discourses around supervision. Again, this is not always a linear and straightforward process. Despite earlier mentioned discourses of master-apprentice, which are grounded in traditional pedagogical models of "one-on-one dyadic supervision or team supervision with a panel of supervisors working together with one student" (Peseta et al., 2021, p. 423), the reality is often more "rhizomatic" and messy, and involves a range of other actors, such as fellow students and academic colleagues. Yet the master-apprentice discourse is strong to the point that it informs the power relations that are structurally set up by it. This affects the experience in significant ways from the very beginning—for example, as part of shaping the PhD study's topic, research questions and methodology.

Negotiating My Methodological Design

While choosing the research topic felt natural, based on my teaching/learning experience, the methodological approach was not an obvious one. I was thrilled to explore disciplinary epistemologies and ontologies of knowledge during my first year of PhD studies, as I have always been very inquisitive, and it challenged my way of thinking and seeing the world. Although I had already stepped into the humanities' research methods through my MA in Linguistics, I felt constrained by existing epistemologies and theories in the area of Sociology. In my research, I wanted to make sure that students' voices were not only heard, but also interpreted as fairly as possible through my study. How could I account for their subjectivities, socially constructed values and beliefs, yet also reconcile their sheer materiality, and thereby justify their views of what already exists? While individuals are independently material people with causal powers of their own, they are also shaped and influenced by (social) discursive pressures. In this sense, using a critical social ontology of language, discourse and culture allowed me to develop an understanding of the entities, powers and mechanisms at work. This philosophical framework was aligned with my research design on the following premises: firstly, my study was aimed at identifying factors that could impact on my informants' constructions of identity through their experiences in a transnational university. Through interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Heidegger, 1996/1962; Smith et al., 2009), I attempted to make sense of the experiences that the participants shared with me, thus co-constructing the phenomenon of identity—for example, when considering how they thought and felt about themselves throughout their educational journey. Secondly, in addition to IPA, I chose another analytical lens, discourse analysis (DA) (Fairclough, 1995), through which I explored how students *talked* about their identities. Negotiating this double analytical lens was not an easy task, and understandably raised various concerns with my supervisors, as these are two well-established and usually self-contained methodological approaches, but they ultimately agreed when I could show evidence in my data set of how they could be complementary in my data analysis. This sense of agency gave me more confidence in the research process and the way in which I understood the phenomenon and processes of identity construction in/through experiences and discourses.

Moreover, being a Western PhD student, researching Chinese students in their home country, I constantly asked myself if I were even "ethically" allowed to do so. However, having lived in China and having been immersed in that culture, during which I built both professional and personal relationships with local people and learnt to appreciate their way of life, I was afforded the opportunity to feel less of a complete outsider. Moreover, I identified with the students as a transnational academic, non-native English speaker, learning in a British academic context. This helped, as language barriers and mistrust are substantive issues when conducting research with Chinese students (Tong & Yong, 1998). These challenges around positionality can be seen as both strengths and weaknesses in the research process, and, while being aware of my kaleidoscopic identity, I could acknowledge how that allowed me to see objective and subjective aspects of my research and how it may have inhibited my vision at the same time. Furthermore, while undertaking a PhD on cultural identity, in the discipline of Sociology, I was often challenged by supervisors to use the classics (e.g., Bourdieu) for conceptual and analytical frameworks—for example, by including elements of class and ethnicity. Not that these are not relevant, but I was trying to gain a perspective "from the inside", and in a more holistic manner. Class hierarchies in Asian society, for instance, are circular and complex (Huang et al., 2018), into which Western sociological theories do not offer nuanced insights. This has encouraged me to read further geographies of knowledge, including Chinese psychology and sociology produced by Asian scholars (e.g., Ho, 1994; Huang et al., 2018). I then began to feel that my thinking process and my gaze were more aligned with the research setting and participants. To some extent, acknowledging locally generated knowledge diminished the power relations between myself, as a researcher, my informants and my meaning-making process. How could I explore students' transforming identities within the university space, which were not exclusively bound to the institution but to their wider lives, including their relatives, their friends and their way of life as youth? How can lived experiences be satisfactorily reduced to one discipline only? In this sense, I tried to negotiate connections between disciplines and not to be afraid of "contaminating" areas of knowledge (e.g., sociology and psychology) when choosing my theoretical and analytical framework. The sociological approach could not dismiss the subjective transformations of the "self" and the explicit meanings that participants gave to them. As noted by Castells (2009), identity is built on personal experience, which, in turn, draws on a history and culture, and

has linguistic and geographic components, through which "people create a cultural construct in referring to something that lies beyond them as individuals but which also defines them as such" (p. 62). Using double analytical lenses (IPA + DA) to address my research questions allowed me to explore identity constructions through students' life experiences, and how they talked about those constructions. By doing so, and based on the themes identified in my data, I proposed a distinction among personal, relational and collective identities, as dimensions of cultural identity constructions. The (Chinese) relational (Hwang, 2000) aspect of identity construction proved to be quite nuanced as compared to the Western philosophical understanding of relational self (Owens et al., 2010). Challenging established knowledge positions to produce new meanings and acknowledging such nuanced aspects were fundamental to increasingly feeling settled in my study, and to my confidence in the knowledge that I was producing through my research. An eclectic, multicultural background shared by me (first author) and one of my supervisors (second author), and lengthy ongoing discussions around these dilemmas, made this possible.

Negotiating an Academic Identity

When my PhD application was accepted, I was given a choice to continue to work in China and study in distance mode. However, as a mature-aged academic, I chose to become a full-time student in the United Kingdom, learning while being immersed in the disciplinary field. Being situated in learning in Sociology and meeting new people during this experience were an important and relevant part the whole doctoral experience, or so I thought.

As a practising teacher at the HE level for a few years prior to my doctorate, and then being cast in the new role of a PhD student, I was not quite sure where I stood. As soon as I started, I constantly looked for information on the programme, the milestones and timelines, and, more importantly, I tried to ask other PhD students what they were doing and why. I believed that I could learn from how they were doing research, and also that we could build a "community of practice" (Wenger, 1998) as PhD students. We were a group of six new students, and I also tried to become acquainted with former/senior students.

This was not an easy task for two main reasons. Firstly, I had previous experience of research in the natural sciences and then in Linguistics in

another country, whereby research practice had been more collegial and constructive. However, during the PhD, we were all developing our own projects and ideas (yet, in my mind, it was not a matter of competition), and I felt that, in this department, students were very protective of their work and did not seem to be willing to share what/how they were doing things. Secondly, I have never shied away from talking to and trying to learn from other scholars' experiences. I believe that this is part of both my identity as a traveller and being an inquisitive person for whom a multicultural environment is the norm. Moreover, in the natural sciences, working with senior renowned (and very demanding) academics in highly hierarchical laboratories had not been an obstacle for me, and approaching them as a junior researcher provided me with unlimited learning opportunities. I also learned that there *is* such a thing as a "stupid question", meaning that we all forget basic things and concepts, but we were expected to be proactive and aligned with the level of study at which we were working— and I am really grateful for that. In this sense, while I was thrilled that I had moved to the United Kingdom and that I was surrounded by researchers and senior scholars just across from my office door, I would like to think that I was not ignorant of the relevant tasks and milestones (as an active cue seeker). Hence, knocking on their doors to exchange perspectives or to hear their opinion on something that I shared would be acceptable, in my view—but that proved to be an uncomfortable endeavour. For instance, I was always asked if my supervisors had been consulted and knew that I was talking to them. I was not sure whether this was a characteristic of the discipline itself, or of that department in particular, but it felt isolating, as if I were not supposed to be talking to them about my research without my supervisor's consent. Why move to another country for a full-time situated learning experience when senior researchers are not willing to talk to you? Is not such an environment supposed to be a space for the free flow of ideas rather than a "sausage factory model" of PhD theses?

It was not until one year into the PhD that I was able to create and run a reading group for fellow PhD students to discuss methods, and also to share the stages of our research as well as the challenges during this journey. This became a safe space for us. It eventually gained popularity amongst new PhD students, who engaged since the beginning of their studies—and that was a rewarding experience because I learned a lot through reflecting on my own research process and the fresh ideas from the newcomers, while supporting my peers' journeys. As for better engagement within the department's academics, it took me a while to realise that,

sadly, there is a highly individualistic culture in the humanities—which can be very frustrating to early career researchers. These experiences were permeated by constant self-examination and doubt about my ability to be part of this new community: "Is it because I am an international student?"; "Is it because I am open and extroverted"; "What does it mean when they say, 'Please let me know if you need anything'"; "Do other students experience the same issues?"

The fact that I had a supervisor outside the United Kingdom (second author), who not only provided feedback throughout the doctorate, but also played a key role as my academic mentor, made a huge difference in my life. He was a senior transnational academic, and I felt comfortable sharing my "inadequacy" with him as well as the continuous internal conflict between rejecting and adjusting to such power structures. I perceive my identity as a whole, rather than through separate personal and academic dimensions: a transnational PhD student/academic/person whose identity is forever an unfinished process of becoming. This has also led me to reflect on how I see things in the world, and how I am affected by it—and, in that context, what that meant for my research.

"Positionality" is one of the most critical elements of qualitative research in terms of validity and reliability. As Smith (1999) noted, "objectivity, authority and validity of knowledge is challenged as the researcher's positionality…is inseparable from the research findings" (p. 436). Positionality in qualitative research requires the researcher to enact ontological assumptions and an epistemological position that integrates the inquirer in every inquiry (Morin, 2008). Constant self-reflection about the research process and how I was involved in this knowledge production, from data collection to analysis and conceptual framework choices, is directly related to acknowledging who I am.

Finally, it is important to mention that I had a supervisory team, of which the second author was part, with very different academic identities and attitudes towards supervision (from my perspective). All these actors and practices during my doctoral journey have shaped my (unfinished) identity, by enabling and/or constraining possibilities of becoming. However, the role of the second author as one of my supervisors was paramount in helping me to reconcile my academic and individual identity in a holistic manner. His emotional and academic support, perhaps as a result of being a transnational (multicultural) scholar, was invaluable for me to navigate the "doctoral learning penumbra" (Wisker et al., 2017, p. 534, as

cited in Bengtsen, 2021), through which I could build confidence and resilience as a researcher.

From a supervisory perspective, each PhD trajectory is a different one, and a crucial element of that is trust. Doctoral candidates experience a significant identity transformation, as they are constantly engaging with and critiquing existing knowledge, including their own worldviews and cultural values. In our case, we had been colleagues for a while, so considerable trust had already been established, and was partly based on similarities in backgrounds (i.e., transnational and multilingual). This meant that we went into the new supervisory relationship almost as a team, which for the candidate meant that she always had a sounding board to work through cultural and identity gaps in a relatively safe space. This process even led to an initial change in institution and supervisory team before the right fit was established. Trust is crucial and is to be ignored at one's peril, as a lack of trust, in combination with diverging expectations, is a strong contributing factor to high attrition rates amongst doctoral candidates (Sverdlik et al., 2018; Young et al., 2019). This applies even more so in transnational and cross-cultural contexts.

Conclusion

Studies of PhD experiences (e.g., Bengtsen, 2021; Wisker & Robinson, 2012) have demonstrated the manner in which doctoral students can become lost and neglected in the complexity of institutionalised support systems that were established to support them. However, it is vital to rely and draw on a variety of forms of support and guidance, whilst keeping in mind that student agency is paramount in the transformative process of reconciling the PhD researcher's identity on the way to becoming an early career academic. At the same time, individual identity formation cannot be taken for granted, and self-reflexivity and positionality need therefore to be nurtured from the outset. Raising awareness of the importance and necessity of fostering collaborative research environments towards broader PhD support can profoundly affect how doctoral education fulfils some fundamental societal functions, such as expert knowledge production and building human capacity to contribute to society. Of course, the range of discourses surrounding the PhD journey, and particularly the ultimate outcomes, is based on a number of assumptions around what counts as "success". The personal biography narrated in this chapter has provided some insight into the continuous negotiation process involved in the

profound (identity) transformation that doctoral candidates go through, which includes critical reflection on dominant discourses about the "PhD journey", as well as the importance of strong supervisory relationships built on trust.

References

Bengtsen, S. (2021). Agency in doctoral education: Towards Graduate School cohesion and a heightened societal awareness. In A. Lee & R. Bongaardt (Eds.), *The future of doctoral research: Challenges and opportunities*. Routledge.

Brailsford, I. (2010). Motives and aspirations for doctoral study: Career, persona, and inter-personal factors in the decision to embark on a history PhD. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 5*, 15–27. https://doi.org/10.28945/710

Castells, M. (2009). *The power of identity*. Blackwell.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Discourse analysis*. Longman.

Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Routledge.

Gravett, K. (2021). Disrupting the doctoral journey: Re-imagining doctoral pedagogies and temporal practices in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education, 26*(3), 293–305. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2020.1853694

Heidegger, M. (1996/1962). *Being and time* (J. Stambaugh, Trans.). State University of New York Press (Originally published in 1927).

Ho, D. Y. F. (1994). Filial piety, authoritarian moralism, and cognitive conservatism in Chinese societies. *Genetic, Social and General Psychology Monographs, 120*(3), 347–365.

Huang, Y.-H., Bedford, O., & Zhang, Y. (2018). The relational orientation framework for examining culture in Chinese societies. *Culture & Psychology, 24*(4), 477–490. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067X17729362

Hwang, K. K. (2000). Chinese relationalism: Theoretical construction and methodological considerations. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 30*(2), 155–178. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5914.00124

Jenkins, T. (2020). A PhD is just the beginning…. *The Biochemist, 42*(4), 60–61. https://doi.org/10.1042/BIO20200037

Moon, K., & Blackman, D. (2014). A guide to understanding social science research for natural scientists. *Conservation Biology, 28*(5), 1167–1177. https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.12326

Morin, E. (2008). *On complexity*. Hampton Press.

Owens, T. J., Robinson, D. T., & Smith-Lovin, L. (2010). Three faces of identity. *Annual Review of Sociology, 36*, 477–499. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1146/annurev.soc.34.040507.134725

Passaretta, G., Trivellato, P., & Triventi, M. (2019). Between academia and labour market—the occupational outcomes of PhD graduates in a period of academic reforms and economic crisis. *Higher Education, 77*(3), 541–559. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-018-0288-4

Peseta, T., Kligyte, G., Bell, A., Hardiman, B., Leadbeatter, D., Pizzica, J., Saliba, G., Salisbury, F., Thomson, K., & Yucel, R. (2021). Borders, paths and orientations: Assembling the higher education research field as doctoral students and supervisors. *Teaching in Higher Education, 26*(3), 422–437. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1885022

Smith, A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. Sage Publications.

Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonising methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. University of Otago Press.

Sverdlik, A., Hall, N. C., McAlpine, L., & Hubbard, K. (2018). The PhD experience: A review of the factors influencing doctoral students' completion, achievement, and well-being. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 13*(1), 361–388. http://informingscience.com/ijds/Volume13/IJDSv13p361-388Sverdlik4134.pdf

Tarozzi, M., & Torres, C. A. (2016). *Global citizenship education and the crises of multiculturalism: Comparative perspectives*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Tong, C. K., & Yong, P. K. (1998). Guanxi bases, *xinyong* and Chinese business networks. *British Journal of Sociology, 49*(1), 75–96. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4451-85-7_3

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press.

Williams, R. (1958). *Culture and society 1780–1950*. Chatto and Windus.

Wisker, G., & Robinson, G. (2012). Picking up the pieces: Supervisors and doctoral "orphans". *International Journal for Research Development, 3*(2), 139–153. https://doi.org/10.1108/17597511311316982

Young, S. N., VanWye, W. R., Schafer, M. A., Robertson, T. A., & Poore, A. V. (2019). Factors affecting PhD student success. *International Journal of Exercise Science, 12*(1), 34–45. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6355122/

Horizontal Leadership and Shared Power: Developing Agency and Identity Through Connected Pedagogy in a Writing Circle at an Australian University

Gina Curró

Introduction

Challenged by the complexity of writing, doctoral students are often concerned with their own positioning as writers, "the means by which [they] create in writing a credible image as a competent member of the chosen discipline" (Swales & Feak, 2012, p. 1). In Australia, doctoral students investigating agency reported attention to writing as beneficial to timely completions, as well as to the challenges of publishing (Maher et al., 2008). The US students engaged in collaborative practice cited "practices, structures, and policies in the faculty that would enhance their doctoral experience" (McAlpine & Asghar, 2010, p. 1010). Agency is essential in building a sense of identity, academic leadership and feeling that you

G. Curró (✉)
Institute for Sport and Health, Victoria University, Melbourne, VIC, Australia
e-mail: grcurro@gmail.com

243

belong to the doctoral research community. While the connection between peer writing groups and text is apparent, how writing groups move beyond writing to developing confident academics is less obvious. This chapter builds on the claim that writing groups function as powerful opportunities for academic professional development, and that "learning to critique in a group context acts as a central pedagogy for learning to write" (Aitchison, 2009, p. 906).

At my university, local and international students enrolled in PhD, masters and honours programmes can join a Thesis Writers' Circle (TWC) at any stage of their research journey. The traditional thesis, as well as thesis by publication, is catered for. Between 6 and 12 members (at times more) meet regularly to discuss their experiences writing and carrying out research, and to critique one another's drafts. Feedback is given on overall structure, argument, readability, logic and thematic consistency of the text, taking into consideration discipline-specific writing conventions, discourse practices, and elements and features of the disciplinary discourses. The effect that the text has on the reader or examiner is discussed; the way that feedback is presented to the writer, and how it is received, are also discussed. In the programme, sentence-level feedback is attended to, but it is not the main focus. "What is explicitly acknowledged is that scholarly writing enters into a network of peer relations: conference presentations, collegial critique of draft texts, the peer review process in journal publishing, etc." (Lee & Boud, 2010, p. 190).

This chapter describes an ongoing developmental programme of critical reading strategies in which members appraised one another's writing and became aware of changes in themselves. Like McKay and Monk (2017), I investigated doctoral identity construction and agency in the interests of career knowledge and skill development in these future career academics. Specific feedback about agency and identity development in progressing doctoral writing was collected to find out how student-centred, connected pedagogy impacted on agency and identity (Aim I), and how explicit practices and specialised discourses influenced writing outputs (Aim II). To this end, student perceptions of their own writing development were analysed. Underpinning my approach to facilitating the TWC is the conceptual framework of pedagogy of connection (Cargill & Cadman, 2005; Pennycook, 1999).

Pedagogy of Connection

"[T]hrough the presence of a teacher as a feeling being as well as [a] thinking one" (Cadman, 2005, p. 357), the connected classroom flourishes. Cadman criticised practices that prioritised materials and teaching approaches over classroom and personal relationships, and advocated "privilege[ing] opportunities for connecting people, understandings, knowledges, feelings" (p. 357). When creating the conditions for connected pedagogy, notions of authority have no place. Uneven power relations with teacher imposed learning outcomes or compulsory classroom expectations are not conducive to connected pedagogy. Borrowing from Cadman, doctoral students in the College of Sport in Society in my university were invited to collaborate on curriculum design. Deciding to meet fortnightly for 90 minutes, they discussed their experiences writing and carrying out research, and critiqued one another's drafts. Unlike the traditional pedagogy of teacher controlled classroom organisation and practice, our democratic classroom embraced autonomy, initiative and self-managed learning. Doctoral student "[a]cademic identities, including identities as researchers, [were] forged, rehearsed and remade in local sites of practice" (Lee & Boud, 2010, p. 188). The dialogic aspect of classroom communication became prioritised in the interests of developing confidence and agency in research identity.

Doctoral Identity and Agency

In order to develop doctoral identity and agency, social and emotional connections (Walker & Palacios, 2016) must be validated. The role that emotion and agency play in academic success is often a silent issue for students (Ingleton & Cadman, 2002); however, they need to be aware of the full range of academic emotions in their lives (Pekrun et al., 2002). Fundamental to identity and language are issues such as gender, race, class, sexuality and postcolonialism (Pennycook, 1999, p. 340), which require consideration in curricular pedagogy. The research read by the Sport in Society TWC included gender studies, anthropology, race, cultural studies, history, philosophy/ethics, psychology and sociology. Using sociocultural conceptual frameworks, they analysed sport in local, national and global contexts, and they critically examined it at the elite, community and junior levels. They debated gender, race, class, diversity and inclusion in different sporting contexts. In our developing discourse community, we

analysed how to communicate and express in writing these important sociocultural and political debates.

The social construction of meaning, its impact on learning (Hanson et al., 2016) and the power of peer learning (Aitchison, 2009) are well documented. Peer learning has been linked with enhanced learning and with positive social and psychological benefits (Hanson et al., 2016). The two main benefits identified by doctoral students of investigating their own writing group are peer learning and peer review, and the ways that the group worked as a community of discursive social practice; they described changes in their own thinking and experience of writing shifting from private to public or shared, and interconnected to the notion of identity building (Maher et al., 2008). They defined the writing group as a powerful site for developing scholarly identity (Lassig et al., 2013). "Our writing group served as a flexible and interactive Community of Practice that shaped critical and durable shifts in identity amongst members" (p. 299). "The importance of a supportive writing group in developing an identity as a teacher educator" was reported by Murphy et al. (2014).

Fundamental to writing and learning are "issues at the level of epistemology and identities. … [T]he literacy demands of the curriculum [are seen] as involving a variety of communicative practices, including genres, fields and disciplines" (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 159). According to Wegener et al. (2016), writing and learning are an identity creation issue: "not only a cognitive process of information processing or knowledge acquisition, but more fundamentally an ontological process, an essential part of becoming somebody, an identity-constitutional process" (p. 1093). In this chapter, notions of doctoral agency and identity were investigated in the everyday lived research learning experiences of members of a writing group engaged in peer learning.

TWC Sport in Society: Day-to-Day Practice

As a "central pedagogy for learning to write" (Aitchison, 2009, p. 906), the organisation (content and format) of the writing group offered unlimited opportunities to focus on discipline specific discourses to develop critical reading and writing skills. The TWC collaborated on curriculum design, and chose to run the writing circle as a meeting, electing a chairperson and notetaker to send email reminders. They encouraged one another to initiate ideas and design resources, such as the template for requesting feedback. Furthermore, they organised a programme of guest

speakers on writing and publication challenges, contributed ideas for writing initiatives and delivered a writing workshop to the group. They designed writing and reviewing interventions, and they invited established researchers to reflect on their lived experience.

They created a schedule of events with future dated meetings (from the start to the end of the year). The schedule contained student submissions linked to guest speakers (supervisors to talk about the challenges of writing and publishing); writing activities or workshops – how to write your Results/Discussion; Active versus passive construction, Tense when writing different sections of the thesis, writing retreats, facilitator led activities; end of the semester goals for personal writing and focused writing plans for the break. Members took turns at chairing meetings to set the specific content, which was mainly peer review of drafts submitted by members a few days before the meeting. The chairperson was responsible for sending email reminders to everyone, which prompted members to submit drafts.

To kick start the peer review, I circulated review guidelines that provided members with criteria for constructive feedback. We discussed peer reviewing as a positive experience that enables members to reflect on their own as well as on others' writing. The *sandwich approach* (positive feedback) is presented first; next is critical feedback, followed by positive feedback again. "In peer feedback, students engage in reflective criticism of the work or performance of other students using previously identified criteria and supply feedback to them" (Falchikov, 2001, p. 2). When a member volunteered to circulate a draft asking for explicit feedback, the cycle of reading and feedback began. Peers reviewed the text prior to the meeting, and then, at the meeting, members critiqued the text. If members strayed from commenting on the written expression into content areas, they were gently prompted about providing constructive/quality feedback on writing only. When one member gave feedback that appeared to change the direction of the writer's argument and the central ideas of the draft, the writer who submitted the draft provided reasons for not wishing to change the direction of his/her argument. Other members supported the writer, demonstrating that the writer has agency to accept or reject the feedback.

Whilst feedback was directed to a particular draft, all participants benefitted from the critique with respect to their own writing. The role of the facilitator, in establishing and maintaining the conditions for running the TWC, was key:

learning as an inherently social act enhanced by communicating and inter-acting with peers; the primary role of the teacher as one of a facilitator of peer learning activities so that the roles of teaching and learning [are] shared responsibilities between students and teachers. (Hanson et al., 2016, p. 192)

I was responsible for setting up the safe and supportive learning space, and for keeping the group motivated and focused. The chairperson reminded members about the next meeting, which gave them agency in the writing circle. Further agency took place at the face-to-face meetings when the member who submitted the draft managed his or her own feed-back discussion.

I drew on my background in applied linguistics and genre pedagogy to provide resources about research writing, based on specific disciplines. I presented "language focussed input through explicit instruction, model-ling, scaffolding and directing writing activities" (Aitchison, 2009, p. 911). I devoted time to designing materials that members requested; for exam-ple, I analysed excerpts of Discussions in examined theses, together with specific teaching texts to highlight the form and function of specialised discourse. Explicit text analysis was one strategy to identify the elements and features of disciplinary writing:

(a) "the structure and organisation of sentences in Results and Discussion (combined and separate).
(b) the function of sentences and levels of generalisation".
(c) verbs in indicative and informative location statements; compara-tive language".
(d) verb phrases for evaluating the strength of claims and the expres-sions of limitations (Swales, 1990; Swales & Feak, 2012)."

Method

I used student evaluation data, complemented by unsolicited feedback from supervisors. At the end of Semester I in 2017, an online survey to capture reflections about experiences in the TWC was uploaded. The questions were designed to trigger thoughts and comments: Has the feed-back practice (peers and facilitator) helped to progress your writing? Can you provide an example? Has your participation in the TWC led to an awareness of changes in self-confidence and success? Have you noticed any changes in your academic self-identity? The scope of this project spanned

three semesters of doctoral students meeting face-to-face every second week (24 meetings), and my first email invited students (and their supervisors) to join the group. All members (including supervisors) were emailed materials that they assessed as useful. The data were analysed thematically.

Results and Discussion

Research Aim I: to determine whether the pedagogy of connection or the "horizontal leadership and shared power" model adopted by the TWC privileged thesis agency and identity development in the members. The data from the questionnaire, together with the examples of student led initiatives, demonstrated changes in attitudes, perceptions and writing behaviours. The personal initiative, resourcefulness, commitment and engagement instigated by members of the TWC showed how "[s]tudent agency seems released at these times, [with the result that] quite surprising results often occur" (Cadman, 2005, p. 361). An unexpected and rich source of data came from the members who initiated ideas and presented resources. There were early discussions about the right to request a specific type of feedback dependent on the particular stage of drafting, planning or writing for each candidate. Members discussed a template or guide for students requesting specific feedback for planning, review and near final drafts (Cadman & Cargill, 2007). When one student redeveloped the template, the prompts for reviewers became more focused, personal and informal-, for example:

"Initial thoughts on what works well? Things that need to be considered." [Below state your specific requests]. Structure and flow: do the paragraphs and sections flow well together in section, pages___? Readability: is my draft easy for the reader to follow? Do you get a clear idea of what _____ is, in terms of how I define it? Any other comments.

Members attached the template when they sent their submissions to the chairperson. The following emails from different chairpersons reflected initiative, agency and identity development:

(a) "*I am interested to know if any students would like particular guests to attend, perhaps even visiting researchers from other universities, or conference attendees. Also, are there any workshops we can host? I can begin to organise these before we start back next semester. I rely on the suggestions from the group, and will be happy to organise*".

(b) *"We had a good session yesterday with Jack's results chapter, including a discussion about establishing a peer-based support group to help in designing and achieving writing goals, and working towards the submission of the thesis. I will approach Sport in Society to talk to us about their publication journey (success and how they handled rejection). If anyone has any suggestions for topics, please let me know. Writing focus activities: so far we have writing in the active and passive voice, and repetition and redundancy. Please let me know your availability for the week of Mon 26th mid semester break for a possible writing retreat"*.

After returning from a five day live-in writing retreat, one chairperson volunteered to discuss his lived experience, asking members to commit to writing. He invited questions and comments, making it dialogic, inclusive and engaged. That initiative led to all members engaging in setting writing goals for the remainder of their candidature.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Research Aim II: to investigate whether explicit practices and specialised discourses influenced writing outputs. "Writing groups can function to demystify the process of scholarly writing and publication, to build skills of review and critique, to provide early audiences for draft texts, and so on" (Lee & Boud, 2010, p. 190). The feedback below showed evidence of timely PhD submissions and, since this evaluation, three more theses were submitted. The themes identified were increased writing outputs, writing skill development, peer review and the socially connected community, and agency and identity.

Increased Writing Outputs

Doctoral students investigating agency reported attention to writing as being beneficial for timely completions, as well as for the challenges of publishing (Maher et al., 2008). TWC members confirmed that the writing circle played a significant role in meeting timely completions for PhD deadlines. Next are writing outcomes showing "a process of simultaneously building a text and an identity as scholarly researcher" (Wegener et al., 2016, p. 1092).

In the first year of my PhD I have published twice: a book chapter and a peer-reviewed article in a top tiered journal. I think that speaks for itself.

 I submitted my PhD in December last year!!!

 Completed a paper for publication in a Q1 journal

 Completed a thesis chapter (and indeed final thesis draft)

 10,000 words (2 chapters), conference paper completed and accepted.

Writing-Skill Development

Knowing about certain rules, in terms of sentence structure and tenses, allowed me to be able to write well and with purpose. I revisited previous drafts to re-edit my work taking out storytelling, passive verbs and so forth. I think this was because the facilitator gave us the correct tools needed to write well, and adopted a scaffolding approach to support us.

 I do feel that the experiences related to writing skills; the consistent discussion of "the use of sign-posts" in TWC was useful.

 Studying sections of text from exemplar theses helped me [to] *write the discussion, conclusion and introduction. I used these to do my candidature document, and the feedback one.*

 One of the most useful tools I have learnt from TWC is the concept of low stakes writing.

 It was massive support for my PhD study as I was preparing my candidature proposal. Other members provided advices about candidature from their experiences that I had made a good progress. Moreover, as I am an international student I had many opportunities of promoting my English by discussing and sharing ideas.

Peer Review and the Socially Connected Community

TWC members collaborated as a scholarly group, supporting one another intellectually, socially and emotionally; their lived experience of the socially connected community was captured as given next.

I remember in the first few meetings feeling tense and exhausted after my text was discussed. I would aim to not respond in defence, but I felt vulnerable/ exposed. Over time, I learned to improve how I wrote (which for me was dividing complicated sentences into simpler, direct statements) and I learned how to best give and receive feedback. "Showing a piece of work … to an audience was like being naked on stage illustrate how writers 'share insecurities' during the development of the researcher identity" (Wegener et al., 2016, p. 1092).

I believe this process [reading and critiquing drafts] makes you a better writer and helps you more critically review your own work. "Peer learning and peer review were also one of the benefits identified by the doctoral students investigating their writing group" (Maher et al., 2008).

It is useful for helping you identify good writers in the group and helping you understand how to improve your writing: "'borrowing brainpower' from peers in order to write better texts" (Wegener et al., 2016, p. 1092).

Critique from peers; facilitator's feedback; reading others' writing; social and emotional support; feedback on grammar and language; discussion about style and writing issues and discussion about critiquing other authors were useful. These are interdependent and valuable at different times and impact [on] *people in different ways in the writing circle. They largely fall into* [three] *categories: peer support, community and feedback, and improving writing style.*

I love that we are all able to have a laugh, and treat the circle not only as a learning and writing tool, but [also as] *a social meeting where we reinforce the space as friendly and encouraging. It really feels like a learning environment due to the culture that we have built and maintain.*

Some of the ideas and comments from students have been exceptionally helpful, and made me think about my work or writing in a way I had not considered before. You are so involved in your work and ideas [that] *sometimes you get lost and cannot see the trees from the forest.*

We are not experts but can be a critical friend in reviewing their work. The writing circle has greatly helped me feel part of a[n] *HDR community, improve the particular writing I submit to the group and help others* [to] *grow whilst building my critical insight toward writing styles.*

The writing circle is [a] *community for HDR students.*

Agency and Identity

Over time, their thinking and experience of writing shifted from private to public or shared, influencing their developing notion of identity building (Maher et al., 2008). "[O]ur writing group served as a flexible and interactive Community of Practice (CoP) that shaped critical and durable shifts in identity amongst members" (Lassig et al., 2013, p. 299). Murphy et al. (2014) cited the supportive writing group as important for developing an identity; the following comments confirmed that this was important for the sport sociology students:

I want to address that an added aspect of TWC is that the leadership is horizontal and power is shared. I believe this is instrumental for a meaningful learning experience to take place.

Being part of TWC provided me with some form of academic self-identity. I used to be isolated and disconnected from the social aspect of student life. TWC reconnected me with a small group of students that have similar research topics. This provided me with an identity to this group that enhanced my PhD experience!

I think there are changes in my academic identity.

Yes, I feel that I am more comfortable in an academic/research space, and more capable of expressing my ideas in a more articulate manner.

I'm more confident in both my writing and presenting because of this group. Even with a perfect supervisor, the PhD process is isolating. It is the nature of the game. To have a group of supportive peers available to read through drafts or to listen to presentations is an invaluable resource.

I feel that I am becoming more confident in my writing and received comments regarding improvements to clarity and flow.

I also think that, as my writing improves, so does my confidence in believing that, if I choose, I can belong in the academic world.

Having a constant social and academic group cannot be underestimated as a tool for support throughout the PhD process. … [T]he motivation and energy for writing is quite high in this group and I enjoy being part of it.

When I come to the TWC sessions I am more enthusiastic about my writing. Writing becomes more enjoyable as the session help [to] motivate and concentrate my efforts towards adequately expressing academic ideas that I am developing in this research process.

During my candidature phase, I had to write a large document, and through the circle I became enthused with my writing and was excited to write. I was much more productive and began to enjoy writing, which had never happened before.

Yes, now I know how to write properly; I feel more confident and better equipped to write. When I was writing my lit[erature] review and candidature document I found the process fun and enjoyable, as I was able to practice writing with the new tools, but also tangibly see the benefits in my writing as my writing became much better. This was from a personal perspective but also from my supervisors, who commented on my writing style.

Unsolicited feedback from supervisors was as follows:

- *Extremely helpful to the PhD students I supervise; improved quality in writing outputs and meeting PhD project milestones.*
- *The benefit and growth our students receive from being part of TWC is enormous. It imbues in them a critical capacity for writing. These are skills that supervisors don't necessarily possess and[,] in recognising this weakness, TWC is absolutely essential.*

Conclusion

By members being engaged in a pedagogy of connection, the skills for sharing their lived research learning experiences in the classroom, their agency and their thesis writing identity construction were developed. The changes in agency led to some surprising outcomes for writing and publishing, which had an impact on researcher identity. In relation to the process of students developing as writers, the feedback showed awareness of learning and changes in thinking about themselves as doctoral candidates. The reference to the TWC dynamics about horizontal leadership and shared power indicated a level of trust, with peers and facilitator communicating openly without regard to any social positioning. This approach to research educational development represents a valuable opportunity for doctoral students to become better skilled researchers and academic leaders. By adopting a pedagogy of connection in thesis writing support programmes, doctoral students stand to gain much more than writing outputs or timely completions: the power to create authentic opportunities for agency and identity change in themselves.

Reflecting on the programme, I acknowledge the social and emotional intelligence of the doctoral candidates. They identified as sociologists and put into their communication practice the notions of diversity and inclusion, to engage effectively with others for peer support. Because many members often worked alone, the TWC provided an important platform to connect with other researchers to reduce social isolation, especially during periods of fieldwork when they collected their data at sports clubs. By taking leadership and having agency over the session structures, they helped to shape their own learning, writing and research journeys.

In conclusion, the supervisors noted changes in their students' writing styles. In terms of future directions, capturing the voices of supervisors in formal interviews would provide rich data about changes in students themselves. With improved agency and identity, doctoral students may influence their own progress, achieve more timely completions and meet the expectations of graduate research centres. As McAlpine and Asghar (2010) argued, *doctoral students can become their own developers*. Actively engaged roles and greater agency in curriculum design will inspire students to use their own voice, and thereby to create improvements in faculty practices, structures and policies across the wider University.

References

Aitchison, C. (2009). Writing groups for doctoral education. *Studies in Higher Education, 34*(8), 905–916.

Cadman, K. (2005). Towards a 'pedagogy of connection' in critical research education: A REAL story. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 4*, 353–367.

Cargill, M., & Cadman, K. (2005, July). Revisiting quality for international research education: Towards an engagement model. In 2005 Australian Universities Quality Forum (p. 45).

Falchikov, N. (2001). *Learning together: Peer-tutoring in higher education.* RoutledgeFalmer.

Hanson, T., Trolian, L., Paulsen, M., & Pascarella, E. (2016). Evaluating the influence of peer learning on psychological well-being. *Teaching in Higher Education, 21*(2), 191–206. https://doi.org/10.1080/1356251 7.2015.1136274

Ingleton, C., & Cadman, K. (2002). Silent issues for international postgraduate research students: Emotion and agency in academic success. *The Australian Educational Researcher, 29*(1), 93–113.

Lassig, C., Dillon, L., & Diezmann, C. (2013). Student or scholar? Transforming identities through a research writing group. *Studies in Continuing Education, 35*(3), 299–314. https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2012.7462262

Lea, M. R., & Street, B. (1998). Student writing in higher education: An academic literacies approach. *Studies in Higher Education, 23*(2), 157–172. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079812331380364

Lee, A., & Boud, D. (2010). Writing groups, change and academic identity: Research development as local practice. *Studies in Higher Education, 28*(2), 187–200. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070320000058109

Maher, D., Seaton, L., McMullen, C., Fitzgerald, T., Otsuji, E., & Lee, A. (2008). Becoming and being writers: The experiences of doctoral students in writing groups. *Studies in Continuing Education, 30*(3), 263–275. https://doi.org/10.1080/01580370802439870

McAlpine, L., & Asghar, A. (2010). Enhancing academic climate: Doctoral students as their own developers. *International Journal for Academic Development, 15*, 167–178. https://doi.org/10.1080/13601441003738392

McKay, L., & Monk, S. (2017). Early career academics learning the game in Whackademia. *Higher Education Research & Development, 36*(6), 1251–1263.

Murphy, S., McGlynn-Stewart, M., & Ghafouri, F. (2014). Constructing our identities through a writing support group: Bridging from doctoral students to teacher educator researchers. *Studying Teacher Education, 10*(3), 239–254. https://doi.org/10.1080/17425964.2014.949656

Pekrun, R., Goetz, T., Titz, W., & Perry, R. (2002). Academic emotions in students' self-regulated learning and achievement: A program of qualitative and quantitative research. *Educational Psychologist, 37*(2), 91–105. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15326985EP3702_4

Pennycook, A. (1999). Introduction: Critical approaches to TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly, 33*(3), 329–348.

Swales, J. M. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings.* Cambridge University Press.

Swales, J. M., & Feak, C. B. (2012). *Academic writing for graduate students: Essential tasks and skills* (3rd ed.). University of Michigan Press.

Walker, J., & Palacios, C. (2016). A pedagogy of emotion in teaching about social movement learning. *Teaching in Higher Education, 21*(2), 175–190. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2015.1136280

Wegener, C., Meier, N., & Ingerslev, K. (2016). Borrowing brainpower–sharing insecurities: Lessons learned from a doctoral peer writing group. *Studies in Higher Education, 41*(6), 1092–1105. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.966671

CHAPTER 16

Long-Range Impact Through Slow Reverberation: Narratives About Mature-Aged Scholars and Making a Contribution

Jeanette Hannaford

INTRODUCTION

For many scholars who join the academy later in life, there has been the need to do other things first: pay bills, raise children, work through traumas and access issues. For some, systemic barriers of socioeconomic class or race or gender have impelled them to contribute some of their valuable knowledges for the benefit of society. Through a metaphor of trilling—the attention-grabbing sound made from repeatedly moving from one note to the next and back again—this chapter considers doctoral discourses and strategies for success through the question: "What is it like to be a mature-aged doctoral candidate, seeking to make a contribution through scholarly work?"

J. Hannaford (✉)
National Coalition of Independent Scholars, Battleboro, VT, USA
e-mail: jhannaford@ncis.org

Writing about the experience of older PhD candidates, I draw on interview data gathered from three case studies. A biography of each of the three participants gives a glimpse of the diverse backgrounds of mature-aged PhD students. All here are women, yet they are not a homogeneous group in terms of race or social background. Inherently, the writing draws upon my own experience as well, as I commenced my PhD as a mid-career, off-campus candidate, graduating when I was 53.

The chapter outlines existing documentation about mature-aged scholars, and personal narrative as a source of knowledge. After the biographies and a closer look at the narrative analysis model, excerpts from the interviews are discussed. Mostly centred around the theme "value", these also note the presence of notions of "luck" in participant talk, and concerns such as isolation. Finally, the chapter brings these case studies together to advance understandings of mature-aged doctoral candidates and their contributions to society.

The Metaphor

This chapter makes imaginative use of a scientific paper to consider these doctoral discourses. I liken the participants' experiences to a study of acoustic sounds made by and used by living things to communicate with other living things (Naguib, 2003)—rather like academics talking. The paper is drawn upon solely as a metaphor. Its particular focus is on bird trills, and examines how far trills reverberate across three landscapes: an open field; a deciduous forest prior to foliage forming; and the same forest in leaf. In it, the researchers found that slow trills are more effective in long-range communication than fast trills.

Drawing on the motive of sonic affect informally, I align mature-aged doctoral candidates with slow-trilling birds. Weighted by more complex understandings resulting from more lived experience, and often juggling more obligations, perhaps they produce a slower trill. However, those slower trills may prove to be effective in long-range, long-time communication between living things, as Naguib's research has determined for birds.

In the writing that follows, doctoral candidates and research master's degree students are collectively written about as postgraduate students, or Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students. Also "fields" are thought of as places to walk and listen to bird-song, as well as containers artificially categorising knowledge into subjects of study.

Mature-Aged Candidates: Numerous, Invisible, Technology-Challenged?

An extensive Australian study, involving nearly 12,000 HDR students, suggested that a linear progression from school to university to HDR to academia is an outmoded model (Edwards et al., 2011). HDR students aged 40 years or older comprised 29.2% of the sample, although the 124 page report did not specifically consider them. While "mature-aged" is the usual term used in Australia to refer to this grouping, the word "mature" was used only three times in the report. At 31.8%, only slightly more of the sample were citizens of countries outside Australia and New Zealand, yet the report considered this grouping in specific sections relating to their future work, and training university teachers to accommodate their needs.

Mature-aged HDR students were also invisible in Australian research involving 366 postgraduate students, based on interviews and two different forms of group gatherings (Eckersley et al., 2016). In this report, a search of the word "mature" resulted in two uses. Both suggested that "mature" HDRs are challenged by technology. For example, in a discussion around effective student-staff interactions to support learning, the report stated, "particularly in the context of postgraduate education, where some students (e.g., mature-aged learners) may have limited experience with technology" (p. 14). While mature-aged HDR students were the example, no data backed up the claim, nor with the second similar example.

More specific attention was shown by Mantai (2019), writing about social support for PhD candidates, who suggested that, while time management pressures are felt by all in the neoliberal university, this may be more so for mature-aged candidates as they possibly have a greater number of additional responsibilities, such as paid work obligations and carer duties. These pressures are aggravated for stakeholders at all levels of the contemporary university by increasing calls on time to comply with bureaucracy and regulations (Edwards et al., 2011).

Mantai (2019) also proposed that older candidates may be expected to be more independent than younger PhD candidates. If older candidates do find themselves in need of support, again Mantai suggested technical issues as the likely culprit for their struggle. In a chapter for potential mature-aged HDR students, Marsh (2014) also made the argument that technology is a reason why returning to university study may be viewed with trepidation. This reductive "old people and technology" discourse is

a narrow framing of the intelligent people, often coming from the professions, who are accepted into postgraduate study. It deserves to be challenged with different accounts that are diverse, respectful and richly layered.

Less public accounts of the experiences of older doctoral candidates are found in intimate spaces of blogs and anonymous memoir writing (for examples, see Wakeford, 2021b). Searching collections of these accounts uncovers different doctoral discourses. Rather than merely a lack of confidence with technology, a sense of discomfort between supervisors and their PhD students owing to the mature-aged student's experience is a commonly reported issue. This is also reported in supervisor accounts (e.g., Wakeford, 2021a, *Amanda's Diary*).

This Research

Self-narratives are culturally shaped, varying according to the societal discourses with which they coexist, interact and intersect. Even a simple retelling of events involves some kind of subjective framing as to what should be told and what should be left out (Bruner, 1987). Bruner suggested, "we *become* the autobiographical narratives by which we 'tell about' our lives" (p. 14; *italics in the original*). As narrative reproductions of experience add voice to the readings that we make of life, they, in turn, shape life experiences going forward; they become the very things that we lean on to understand our pasts.

This chapter uses the spoken narrative form of interviews as a form of text, a notion that has been problematised by narratologists (DeFina & Georgakopoulou, 2012). In interviews, to a certain degree, co-construction of the narrative happens, as the interviewer's responses influence how the interviewee continues. This meaning-making is partially played out in the senses that surround the linguistic exchange, an affective field that might be viewed as an in-between space between the actors in a shared exchange (da Silva & Leander, 2019). This is complicated when the interview is held across digital mediums, as the interviews in this chapter were.

Dr Geertsema, Dr Slater and Dr Viardot are three cis-gender, female-identifying recipients of PhDs, aged from the late 40s to the mid-60s, collectively referred to as "the research participants". Pseudonyms maintain their privacy and anonymity. Each participant has a different occupation and field of study. They come from a mix of cultural backgrounds.

Despite these differences, there are similarities across the group. For example, they were the first members of their family to receive a doctorate. Also, they consider themselves quite savvy with technology.

Two of the participants were members of an academic reading group that I organise in New York. More recently, we write in one another's company over Zoom as we now live on different continents. I invited them to be part of the research, and they willingly agreed to participate.

In order to find another participant, I posted a message to a Facebook group for people who start or re-enter study in their 40s or older. Thirty-three people responded. I chose Dr Slater because her profession and academic field seemed quite different from those of the existing participants.

Only 2 of the 33 people who responded appeared to identify as men. While a male participant may have offered an additional avenue of difference, after a good deal of thought, I reassured myself that it was not necessary specifically to decide to select one of the two. Women take up increasing numbers of places in universities (Vieira et al., 2020), and they have been excluded from historical documentation for centuries.

The three participants were interviewed individually online (via Zoom). These hour-long interviews were loosely structured; participants were invited to tell stories about their doctoral experience. A follow-up interview was held with Dr Geertsema. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Other data included emails, digital text messages, social media posts and other forms of autobiographical writing.

Interview transcripts were read through alongside one another to identify key themes and concerns. Small anecdotes that appeared as sidelines—mini-tellings, alongside the speakers' main narratives—were marked. Then the data were analysed through the framing of Small Stories Research (Georgakopoulou, 2007, 2010, 2015, 2016), focusing on the minor anecdotes presented alongside a more "practised" narrative. This is further explained and exemplified after the biographies.

The Biographies

Dr Geertsema (Dr G) is a White woman based in the Netherlands. She is a political analyst with a background in linguistics and literature studies who has worked as a journalist, an editor, a communication adviser to members of parliament and a public affairs advisor. She writes a blog about Dutch politics, and she is a contributor to the Dutch newspaper-of-record. She has recently started a business, and will soon commence a new post

coordinating short courses in public affairs at a Dutch university. Dr G commenced her PhD work at the age of 47, as an external candidate. She felt the need to *be* an expert, rather than continue to interview experts in her work as a journalist. In 2020, she completed her dissertation by publication, in English her second language, graduating with honours, after a period of nine years.

Dr Slater (Dr S) is a White woman based in the United Kingdom. She volunteers as a mentor, trustee or chair for a number of organisations involved in supporting gender equality and health, meditative practice, and networks connecting independent scholars and scholars-in-training. She commenced a PhD exploring the social responsibility of businesses just before her 60th birthday, and she graduated five years later. Prior to this, studying for a master's degree had ignited a love of research. During the first year of her candidature, she retired from her career in the public sector. Now, at the university where she obtained her degree, Dr S mentors master's degree students and, using the title "Visiting Researcher", she collaborates on research projects.

Dr Viardot (Dr V) is mixed race: born in Cameroon to a French mother and an East African father, she is now based in Australia where, in her early 40s, she started her PhD. She was a practising artist with an international following prior to commencing. Her artwork, like her research, emphasises cultural inequities and exploitation. Dr V felt that much of her time as an artist was taken up talking to people about their responses to her work. Her doctoral studies gave her strategies to develop these conversations. Her PhD, written in English her second language, explored the representation of girlhood with a cross-cultural approach. Upon submitting her dissertation, she relocated to the United States to work as a lecturer on gender and race.

Small Stories

My interest here is in "how selves and identities are *'done'* in interactions" (Bamberg, 2007, p. 173; *italics in the original*). Underpinning this is an understanding of identities as interactional and performative—a fragmented and relational process of being. Small stories, a method for narrative analysis, helps to bring this perspective to the dataset. It is used here with a light-handed application as an open-ended focus for inquiry.

The following small story was taken from my interview with Dr S:

> Dr S (35.27): Luckily, my daughter's partner is an academic. And, when I was chatting to him, he said is common across UK universities that universities are only geared up [small pause, then a slower, more enunciated delivery]
>   for the full-time young [stressed].
>   PhD students: Yeah? [As if checking that I have understood this point.]

Prior to this, Dr S was speaking of her long career and her third sector roles, foregrounding claims to "prestige" and "power" as she told me about her life. We had not previously met, so this formal and positive self-framing was understandable. This small story, or mini-telling, commenced in keeping with the speaker's previous claims of "power"—"my daughter's partner is an academic". This statement was used to reinforce the following claim of authority: "[it] is common across UK universities". Then Dr S shared a belief about mature-aged PhD students, generalised for a large sector of the community: "universities are only geared up for the full-time young PhD students".

Small stories within a greater narrative arc rely heavily on interaction, the need to connect with another person. In this instance, it may be that in her pauses Dr S was seeking to check my facial reactions and to see if I shared her view. As interview speech is not usually contested; the negotiation of understandings between the two people present plays out in non-verbal ways.

With this small story, my understandings of Dr S's beliefs and positions advanced. It also gave access to some of her other social identities: a mother, a mother of an adult. Moments like this mark a different moment in interviews, as though between official and unofficial parts of the narrative.

Following are small stories grouped around the themes of value, luck and isolation, which dominated the interviews.

The Data

There was a range of ways that the theme of value was integrated into the interviews. Dr V spoke of her PhD as her prime asset:

> Dr V (30.13): As an older person, when I look back in my life, my PhD is probably the only thing I've got. Because, unlike some other person, I have not accumulated wealth. … And a lot of people don't have a PhD. So it's

kind of a rise to a certain extent. But this valorisation to be called "doctor" is the only thing probably as an older person that I could look back and say, "I've got that".

In Dr V's perception, her PhD "is probably the only thing I've got". The small story that she then shared allowed a more intimate understanding:

> Dr V (31.20): When I went to the bank in France, and he asked me some questions, and he was, I could see, he was stunned to realise, I have all of that—I could write a book, I have a PhD, I have all these things. And I have no money. And I could see at his face corner. [Gestures with hands to show a downturned mouth.]
>   Ah! [Exclaims.]
>   And I was like, oh [slow, stressed], reality hit back.

Dr V has had success teaching in the U.S., where courses in gender and racism are topical. Yet as an adjunct lecturer Dr V experiences economic insecurity, and she faces a lack of understanding regarding this. A recent article that she wrote for *The Conversation* website received 15,000 reads in one month. She has a publishing contract for an academic monograph. However, she is trying to return to Australia, her home, and she has deep concerns about Australian universities' focus on international fee-paying students, for whom her courses on gender and racism are not in high demand.

Dr S is proud of her PhD, enjoys researching and desires to continue academic pursuits. Helped by skills honed for her PhD, she volunteers hours of her time for civic work. However, the following stories illustrated the discomfort that she felt regarding her university as a workplace during and after her PhD studies:

> Dr S (3.41): Sometimes it's not always paid [laughs],
>   but I get something out of it, okay? [high pitch, accentuated.]
>   (6.38): You're paid a flat fee per student. It's for six hours. … All the prep and all the admin[istration] stuff you do outside that. … Okay, it's hard work, I'm not saying it's easy, but it's very good at making you think. … I was appointed a research fellow earlier this year. … That funding only lasted a couple of months, but it was good while it was there.
>   (47.00): I often collaborate with x. Some [stressed] of it was paid. He's moving universities, and he said he still wants us to go on collaborating.

Dr S finds a sense of identityIdentity/ies as a doctoral scholarScholar/s: she likes teaching, reviewing for academic journals, researching with academics whom she considers as "her colleagues". Nonetheless, she seemed frustrated, as though trying to convince herself, rather than the listener, that the university was valuing her work in an acceptable manner: "I get something out of it, okay?"

Dr G spoke about how her research brought value to the wider society. She reinforced a different subjective stance around her doctoral identity with her desire to be the expert, foregrounding the belief that "I make value" and the worthiness of "making your research; getting value for society". Even so, she also expressed discomfort in a small story around not being compensated for scholarly work:

> Dr G (32.29): I can go on doing what I do, not earning any money. And that is not nice. But it's not. … It's not a disaster, right? So I can, we can, we're not like dependent on that.

Dr G's dissertation included a chapter detailing how her research contributes to society, as is typical across the Netherlands. She believes that typically people write this and do not action it, but it was something that she was doing: "Nobody does it, and they will think it's very interesting and very difficult, difficult". She started a business teaching communication courses for various sectors of society, and is working on a short book simplifying her highly theoretical research for the general public.

Conversations around the value that a mature-aged PhD scholar brings to her university were prevalent:

> Dr G (14.47): I brought all my experience in political communication. I worked in the field for 20 years before that. … And this experience is that, you know, the field from within. … So I think that's really valuable, that you can add.

However, the conversation topic of being "overqualified" sat alongside these value claims, as was seen in this small story:

> Dr S (10:13): You know, when you get to, when you get a question in the interview that says, "Are you a bit overqualified to be doing this?" [Pause, then extended laugh.]
> Interesting. [Lower pitch.]

LUCK AND LONELINESS

Luck was a common element in participant stories (as was already seen when Dr S claimed to be lucky because her daughter's partner was an academic who offered her some insider knowledge to navigate scholarly worlds).

Despite her expertise and publication record, Dr G felt that luck was required to continue with her career. During a second interview, she described being offered a job as a miracle:

> Dr G (00.35): I just got a new position [sing-song, accentuated]. … I'm very much looking forward to it. It's, it's really exactly on my field. So, yeah, it's sort of a miracle.
>   [Then more quietly.] I just gave up on it. And then it just happened.

Dr V often used the word "privilege" to describe her luck in doing scholarly work. Only once did she flip this, using "privilege" to speak about others lucky enough to be entrenched in the academic community:

> Dr V (34.01): A lot of people in academia are in privileged situation at the end of the day, and I don't think they feel the same need as I had to make a contribution.

Dr S described "a lucky escape" from a working relationship in her university. In a small story drawing from her past career, she used experience as her guide: "Yeah, been there. I've done all the politics of the game playing and all that. No, sorry."

Dr S also spoke of the luck of having a friend, an old work colleague, who was a PhD candidate at a different university at the same time. Dr G, an external candidate, needed to seek friends in alternative spaces after her dissertation advisors discouraged her from connecting with other PhD candidates in her university:

> Dr G (29.07): Gosh, no, no, I had no contact at all. Only with my advisors. … But my advisors also said, "Yeah, you can become a member of the research school, but they're all like children. That's nothing for you. You're far beyond that". So they said, "No, that's nothing for you". But, with insight, I, I sort of regret that I didn't do that. I should have done that.

Deconstructing Existing Discourses

These small stories give insight into three individuals' doctoral identities. I hold these disparate case studies in some kind of unity to construct my arguments. Despite coming from different places and scholarly fields, they are equals in a network of mature-aged scholars, working amongst other actors, material and other, particularly "the university".

There is a sense that, as mature-aged doctoral candidates, these three scholars felt "othered" by the university. This was seen in Dr G's advice from her supervisor and in Dr S's insider comment. Despite the expertise that they brought to their universities, and their desire to make a contribution to society, there was a prevalent sense that they were lucky to have the opportunity, rather than being valued as contributors.

I was struck by the number of references to small remuneration and to unpaid work and how they mirrored well-documented expectations that women will take on this work for society (United Nations, 2017). Dr S spoke about the work that she does for the "payment" of an email address and library access. Arguably, these attributes do not bring additional costs to the university, while the university receives hours of free labour in return. This is not the volunteering that Dr S actively chooses to do for the third sector; instead, it is work, organised with a "click bait" allure; sometimes she will be paid. Like the adjunct salary that is not liveable, it is an aspect of the current university that, as Dr V suggested, is not well known beyond the academy.

It was also unsettling to hear the frequency of talk around notions of "luck", in the sense of being overlooked, as well as being lucky to have the opportunity to do research. This was particularly noticeable in Dr V's talk about privilege. As her work as an artist does not generate a living wage, she believed that it is not really recognised. She surmises that "When I look back in my life, my PhD is probably the only thing I've got" as a marker of her value to society.

At the same time, Dr V is struggling with the strict time constraints that an academic publisher is placing on her as she writes a monograph on a topical theme (for a very small percentage of profits). As with Dr G's slow and meticulous crafting of her publication-based PhD over nine years, after starting at the time of life that was possible, these scholars work at the speed that is possible.

A failure to grasp the contribution that these older new members of the academy make seems a significant failure to realise the value and potential

of voices of experience. Rendering them invisible for not emerging onto the scene earlier or faster does not make sense. They are a different kind of signal producer.

Rethinking the Mature-Aged Doctoral Candidate

These mature-aged doctoral candidates bring experience and expertise to the university. They develop strategies for success, such as finding a PhD buddy, a group of like-minded academic writers and/or readers to work alongside, and joining groups on social media. Now, through their (ongoing) publications, through taking their work to the general public and in using their research skills in their support of third sector organisations, they impact on the advancement of knowledge to wide-reaching, widely ranging societal benefit. All participants were clear about the contributions that society needed from them.

Even for a mature-aged candidate, undertaking a doctorate is a time of marked individual growth. Yet the potential benefits to society of older candidates taking this path seem overlooked, as does the need for some older candidates also to garner income. This seems blind to a range of changes in this period of history, including the ageing of populations in many countries (United Nations, 2019).

Dr S's belief that universities are structured to support younger, full-time doctoral students, a belief confirmed by an academic, calls for further investigation. Is it entrenched academics who continue to prolong this prioritisation? There is a scarcity of data specifically considering mature age doctoral discourses. This is particularly the case around free and low-paid labour in university settings and for the academic publishing industry, and taking into account people who fly under the radar of traditional academic spaces, such as members of scholarly associations like Fire UK and the National Coalition of Independent Scholars. Moving beyond the prevalent ageist trope of "old people and technology", disrupting ongoing biases and addressing issues such as isolation, invisibility and devaluing what these candidates bring will aid the success that future candidates enjoy and offer.

The metaphor introduced at the start of this chapter considers how far signals, or sounds, travel across different environments. It documents bird trills reverberating across different landscapes: an open field; a deciduous forest prior to foliage forming; and the same forest in leaf (Naguib, 2003). High fast trills can carry short distances across open fields; however, lower,

slower reverberations are more effective for long-range communication, especially across vegetation-dense spaces.

Imagine birds with high fast trills as youthful scholars who proceed directly into postgraduate study without any additional life-enriching understanding. There may be academic subjects that lend themselves to this direct progress, (open) fields in which freshness and speed are useful. Perhaps, though, the fields represented here—cultural studies, politics, business, arts and education—are more comparable to a forest—complex social subjects, dense and tangled. In these spaces, the low slow trill of experience may carry further. Tooled to sustain a reverberation between theoretical understanding and lived experience, the slow trills of mature-aged doctoral scholars offer far-reaching perspectives.

Conclusion

A doctorate is a space for transformation over time, and belonging, and contribution for all. I think of the research participants here as mature, useful citizens, embodying a never-finished, always in process, experience of being scholars and learners. Their contributions have been long in the making. I like to imagine that the reverberations of their work will resonate across distance and time.

References

Bamberg, M. (2007). Stories: Big or small: Why do we care? In M. Bamberg (Ed.), *Narrative—State of the art.* (pp. 165–174). John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/bct.6.17bam

Bruner, J. (1987). Life as narrative. *Social Research, 54*(1), 11–32. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40970444

da Silva, A. C., & Leander, K. (2019). Thinking and feeling the interval: A few movements of a "transnational" family. In K. Leander & C. Ehret (Eds.), *Affect in literacy learning and teaching: Pedagogies, politics and coming to know* (pp. 124–142). Routledge.

DeFina, A., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2012). *Analyzing narrative: Discourse and sociolinguistic perspectives.* Cambridge University Press.

Eckersley, B., Crane, L., Kinash, S., Bannatyne, A., Hamlin, G., Partridge, H., Richardson, S., Rolf, H., & Udas, K. (2016). *National research on the postgraduate student experience: Case presentation on postgraduate student diversity (vol. 2 of 3).* Australian Department of Education and Training. https://postgraduatestudentexperience.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/PGSE-Case-Study-2.pdf

Edwards, D., Bexley, E., & Richardson, S. (2011). *Regenerating the academic workforce: The careers, intentions and motivations of higher degree research students in Australia: Findings of the National Research Student Survey (NRSS)*. Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). https://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1024&context=higher_education

Georgakopoulou, A. (2007). *Small stories, interaction and identities*. John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/sin.8

Georgakopoulou, A. (2010). Reflection and self-disclosure from the small stories perspective: A study of identity claims in interview and conversational data. In D. Schiffrin, A. De Fina, & A. Nylund (Eds.), *Telling stories: Language, narrative, and social life* (pp. 123–134). Georgetown University Press.

Georgakopoulou, A. (2015). Small stories research: Methods—Analysis—Outreach. In A. De Fina & A. Georgakopoulou (Eds.), *The handbook of narrative analysis* (pp. 255–271). Wiley-Blackwell.

Georgakopoulou, A. (2016, July 1-2). *Beyond (trans)language: Social media-literate identities through the small stories lens* [Keynote address]. Literacy, Language and Identity Conference, Sheffield University, UK.

Mantai, L. (2019). A source of sanity: The role of social support for doctoral candidates' belonging and becoming. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 14*, 367–382. https://doi.org/10.28945/4275

Marsh, B. N. (2014). Trust yourself, oh wise person: The mature returning student. In C. McMaster & C. L. Murphy (Eds.), *Postgraduate study in Aotearoa New Zealand: Surviving and succeeding* (pp. 122–132). NZCER Press.

Naguib, M. (2003). Reverberation of rapid and slow trills: Implications for signal adaptations to long-range communication. *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America, 113*(3), 1749–1756. https://doi.org/10.1121/1.1539050

United Nations. (2017). *Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work (Report of the Secretary General)*. Economic and Social Council, Commission on the Status of Women. https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/CN.6/2017/3

United Nations. (2019). *World population prospects 2019: Highlights*. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019_Highlights.pdf

Vieira, D., Mutize, T., & Chinchilla, J. R. (2020). Understanding access to higher education in the last two decades. *UNESCO IESALC Blog*. https://www.iesalc.unesco.org/en/2020/12/23/understanding-access-to-higher-education-in-the-last-two-decades/

Wakeford, J. (2021a). *PhD diaries*. University College London, Teaching and Learning. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/professional-development/arena-open/research-supervision/phd-diaries

Wakeford, J. (2021b). *PhD diaries 2008–2021*. Missenden Centre, Links. http://www.missendencentre.co.uk/phdiaries.html

My Doctoral Journey in India: A Transformational Opportunity to Know Myself

Vinod Kumar Bonu

INTRODUCTION

It is only in retrospect that I am writing this chapter. It is best said by Soren Kierkegaard, "Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forward" (as cited in McCallum, 2019, n.p.) and in a similar line of thought, Steve Jobs said, "You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards" (Jobs, 2005, n.p.) in his Stanford University commencement speech in 2005. I have always felt that nothing is absolute in life; everything is constantly changing and is in constant motion. I am always in awe of the quotations by philosophers that tell about the incompressible, complex and incredible aspects of life packed into a single sentence. Somehow and somewhere from deep within, I realised that those words of wisdom came only after enormous life experiences. Sometimes I spent days and nights just pondering on a single

V. K. Bonu (✉)
University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, India

quotation. There are several quotations by philosophers that I have come across that resonated with me. So, in this context, I present the statements made by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who said, "You cannot step into the same river twice" and "Change is the only constant in life" (as cited in Graham, 2021, n.p.), which reminds us to embrace change.

I feel that I am constantly evolving or changing with every moment. The views that I present here are at the current state of reality that I am in (while writing this chapter). My current reality (my life experience in this period) is nothing close to my perception or experience before I started my doctoral journey. Sometimes it honestly feels transformational with almost no link or a lost link in between. For example, I moved from a depressed state of being to a happy state of mind. I also transformed from a person sitting in a corner and avoiding all social interaction, to a person voluntarily taking classes and participating in activities that I had never imagined.

The quest for knowing started a long time ago. One of the best ways to quench the thirst for knowledge is by asking questions. I believe that it is one of the fundamental aspects of being. So let me start by asking, "What does one mean by 'success'?" What is one's idea of success? As I experience this life, I realise that there are no inherent meanings to anything in life. It is human beings who attach meanings to everything. Therefore, what is success for one might not mean the same for the other. Even though I came across many definitions of success, the one that most resonated with me was Earl Nightingale's definition, which says, "Success is the progressive realisation of a worthy goal" (as cited in Campbell, 2019, n.p.). The goal for me, like many, is freedom.

BACKGROUND STORY

If I see my life as a book, then Chapter 1 would cover my primary six years of schooling—that is, until my fifth standard (schooling year), a multicultural and multilingual space. Chapter 2 would cover my seven-year stay at the Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV) boarding school until my 12th standard (schooling year). The school was where my preliminary ideas, beliefs and identities had been moulded. The school was one of the 580+ government boarding schools covering almost every district of India except the state of Tamil Nadu. Every student who studied here is identified as a "Navodayan", which can be roughly understood as a person revived again with new essence and identity. The JNV schools currently

have more than one million alumni or "Navodayans", making it one of the largest in the world. Chapter 3 would cover my five-year study at the University of Hyderabad for acquiring an integrated master's degree. Apart from obtaining the degree, I have also been part of the university athletics team for four years and represented the university eight times at the national level meets. Finally, Chapter 4 would be my doctoral journey, which is going to come to an end soon. So what one can expect from the following paragraphs is a walk-through of Chapter 4 of my life history to date. Firstly, the chapter covers how I entered the doctoral study with a bit of a background story. Then it presents a case of the basic doctoral structure in the Indian higher education system or an Indian university. This story constitutes a narrative of my experiences during the process of conducting the research. I present it chronologically while focusing more on how Yoga, running and cycling are helping to bring my doctoral journey to an end.

Why I Entered Doctoral Study

I completed my integrated master's (bachelor's + master's) degree in a higher education institution where the majority of the students were involved in research. It was very common to keep meeting the doctoral students daily; in fact, some of them even taught us classes while I was doing my bachelor study. Hence the environment was already conducive, and there was a natural inclination towards research. The basic notion was that a higher degree would eventually yield a better living/job. One of my teachers planted the seed of completing a Doctorate in Philosophy (PhD) when he suggested applying for the Rhodes Scholarship. I did not know how prestigious the scholarship was when I started the process of application. The application process has led me to do things that I would not have imagined doing back then. Being an extremely introverted person, I had seldom interacted with any of my teachers/professors, with very few exceptions in my 18 years (until my master's degree) of student life. However, in order to complete the application process, I had to initiate interaction with the professors. For the first time, I prepared my CV and a personal statement. I naturally answered the fundamental questions about my past, my present and how I saw my future. These forced me to reflect on my life, and on the decisions that I had made. The two things that had had a profound impact on my life on campus kept coming back, so I started exploring them: the long distance running, and anthropology. As

I was exploring the relevant courses for further studies, I stumbled upon the Anthropology of Sport course in one of the universities in the United States of America. I turned my attention to that research area, and that is where I am currently working. Even though I did not receive the fellowship, considering that only five students are selected every year from India, I had literally zero expectations. Being selected for the first round of interviews and being the only student from the state of Andhra Pradesh (before bifurcation) to do so boosted my confidence enormously. Nonetheless, the entire process was a satisfying and enriching experience as I have done things that I never thought of before.

Another major factor was the University Grants Commission-National Eligibility Test (UGC-NET). This biannual examination was almost a ritual for all the master's students. The UGC-NET is the minimum qualification criterion to apply for the lecturer and assistant professorship posts in India. Further, a Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) awarded to the top percentile of the UGC-NET candidates allowed students the opportunity to take up research. Thus, earning the UGC-NET and a JRF has helped me to get into the university's doctoral programme. Moreover, the financial support has helped to convince my parents that I should accept the doctoral programme as I was from a lower middle class family. Many middle class and lower class families in India expect financial support for the family, and, as a matter of fact, most of the family members do not understand what a PhD is.

The term "JRF" applies to the first two years of the fellowship. After a document that comprises the first two years of work is submitted, it then converts to a Senior Research Fellowship (SRF). There is a set procedure to acquire the fellowship. It is a ritual for every JRF scholar to submit a continuation form every month in the fellowship section of the administration block in the university, which is duly signed by the supervisor and the head of the department.

The Higher Education System and Departmental Expectations

The Indian government established the University Grants Commission (UGC) through the University Grants Commission Act, 1956, to coordinate and determine standards in universities. After more than five decades, the UGC brought in new regulations and referred to them as "the UGC

regulations 2009". These constitute the minimum standards and procedure for the award of the Master of Philosophy (MPhil)/PhD degree. These regulations state that a PhD scholar shall do the following: (a) complete the coursework; (b) prior to the submission of the thesis, make a pre-PhD presentation to the members of the department; and (c) publish one research paper in a peer-reviewed journal before submitting the thesis. These criteria applied to gaining a PhD degree between 2009 and 2016. Since I had joined the programme in 2015, these requirements were the ones that I needed to follow. Once again, in 2016, UGC formed new rules and regulations that applied to the MPhil/PhD students joining from the 2016 academic year. In my general observation, it seems that India is still experimenting with the overall education system. The regulations have been changing every few years. India is currently drafting a new National Educational Policy, which will be implemented in the near future.

Following the guidelines given by the UGC, the Department of Anthropology has a general framework for doctoral students to follow. These are:

- Coursework: Complete the coursework within two years of joining the course. The coursework is for one semester, including three courses: (a) advanced methodology: qualitative and quantitative research; (b) advanced anthropological theories; (c) researcher's broad area of interest.
- Pre-field seminar: The doctoral student is expected to present the research proposal, which includes literature review, pilot study, objectives of the study, methodology, elaborated fieldwork plan and tentative thesis chapterisation. Generally, a student takes two years to give a pre-field seminar.
- Fieldwork: Scholars are expected to conduct lengthy fieldwork, mostly around a year's duration, based on the nature of the study in order to collect authentic and reliable data. Over 90% of the research works in the department are related to either tribes or villages.
- Pre-submission seminar: After writing the thesis and engaging with the initial round of corrections from the supervisor, the student presents a seminar to the entire department to apply any recommendations and to make final corrections before submitting the thesis.
- Open viva voce examination: After receiving the comments from the external examiners, the scholar must attend the open viva voce examination, which will be the final step.

What Were the Actual Experiences?

I have tried to be as chronological as possible in terms of stages. Having lived in the campus hostel for five years while pursuing my integrated master's degree, I wanted to live independently, and so I rented a room close to the university. Choosing this opened up a lot of freedom and responsibility at the same time.

Stage 1: Coursework

The classes per se were not hectic, but the theories were hard to comprehend. Hence much effort went towards understanding them, with multiple readings and discussions with other doctoral students.

During this time, I was suffering from my heel injuries and I literally could not stand for even two minutes. So I was trying to consult doctors and to understand my injury. I went to some of the well-known hospitals in the city. The doctors whom I consulted could not pinpoint the exact injury. After two months of ultrasound treatment and some rehabilitation work, I did not see any improvement. They thought that it was either tendinitis or plantar fasciitis (a prevalent injury for runners that affects the heel part of the legs). Some even suggested that I go for surgery. I was not sure what to do, and I could not concentrate on any research. Being a runner and being fit all my life, I could not accept myself in that condition. I was depressed at that time, having been suffering from the injury for more than six months and gaining eight kilograms. My coach advised me not to opt for any kind of surgery as I was only 22 years of age and I should consider a possibility of healing in other ways. He suggested that I go for cross-training. Hence I started looking at the bicycles, which does not directly impact on or contact the ground. It seemed like a better option. Therefore, I entered the world of cycles and cycling.

Having realised the significance of sport as a major part of who I am, I started exploring cycling and looking for literature related to anthropology and sport. To my surprise, there are very few books written on this area and almost none in India. So I have started reviewing the literature available online and requested one of my friends in the United States of America to send to me the most relevant books second hand as they were expensive. It took almost a year to get my hands on those books. Meanwhile, I started exploring cycling and observing the city's cycling community, which was growing exponentially day by day. The early

participation helped to build rapport with the cycling community in the city, building my fitness or base mileage and my know-how about the bicycles. Each of these elements gave me an understanding that has eventually led to work on "randonneuring". This is a French term and can be understood as long-distance cycle touring, having originated in the 1890s in France. This acquaintance period is what anthropology of sport scholars using experiential ethnography called the "passive stage" (Sands, 2002) of fieldwork.

… And Then Yoga

So it happened exactly how the father of Yoga, Patanjali, starts the first Yoga sutra with half a sentence: "and now Yoga" (Sadhguru, 2016, pp. 71–83). And Jaggi Vasudev, also known as Sadhguru (a yogi and mystic), interprets the first Yoga sutra by saying that "if you still think your life will become better with a new house, a new car, more money, or whatever else, it is not yet time for yoga". Only if one realises that these material goods do not fulfil your life in any way is it appropriate to say, "and now Yoga" (Yoga Sutra Explained: Absolute Focus, 2018, p. 10)

Similarly, I was so desperate to come out of the injury and my depression that I did not want to leave any stone unturned. Hence, I turned towards Yoga. It was coincidental that, just ten days before joining the doctoral programme—that is, 21 June 2015—it was declared as the International Yoga Day by the United Nations General Assembly and celebrated annually. I participated in that event conducted at the university, and my Yoga journey began on that day.

During the coursework, I was regularly attending physiotherapy sessions. Disappointed with my lack of progress, while continuing with Yoga, I heard about naturopathy at a nature cure centre. So I went for a 21-day treatment programme in Kerala, India, almost 1000 kilometres away from where I stayed. I had little knowledge about what was to occur. That programme gave me an entirely new perspective on food and how much it affects the body and thought processes. Even though I had heard about fasting here and there throughout my whole life, I had never paid attention to it. I was a foodie and was always in what I used to call a "hungry mode". I used to eat three to four times what I am currently eating. The Nature Cure Centre put me on liquid fasting, which was supposed to last for 14 days. I had to stop it as I lost almost eight kilograms in the first nine days of the liquid fast, such was my metabolism. I was back to my ideal or my racing weight—that is, 56 kilograms.

It seems that only at the helm of crisis do we realise the importance of what we have and what we have for too long taken for granted. Now I understand the old philosophy or common wisdom when reference was made to "You don't know what you have until it's gone" (Tsangwinglun, 2016, n.p.)

And Yoga, in a way, seems to make one realise quite paradoxically how fragile we as human beings are when it constantly reminds us to focus on breathing, which is so fundamental for our life, and yet no one pays attention to it. And at the same time Yoga reminds us of the immense possibilities of which a human being is capable if one masters the art of controlling or understanding the body, mind, emotion and energy on a much deeper level

So what is Yoga? Like many, I, too, had my share of misconceptions. I thought that it was just one more form of physical exercise that focuses more on the flexibility aspect of the human body. Even though I had an opportunity at the university, I was not indulging in it simply because I loved intense activity that can help with sweating. But I slowly learned its significance. So I think that a yogi is the best person to describe the word "Yoga" (Sadhguru, 2016, pp. 71–83)—hence, quoting Jaggi Vasudev also known as Sadhguru (2016), "The word Yoga means union. That means you consciously obliterate the boundaries of individuality and reverberate with the rest of the cosmos" (n.p.). It simply sounded like freedom for me—freedom from all the labels and identities attached to me. Being introverted and silent and not indulging in much social connection, I was most often misunderstood or misinterpreted. When I am alone, I do not feel lonely; in fact, that is the best time to be free from all the unnecessary commotion. I think that very few people understand the difference between feeling alone and being alone.

Stage 2: Yoga and Cycling

I continued going to Yoga classes, and I would observe my body daily and how rigid or stiff it had become over the years. I had lost my flexibility, and I sensed that this might be the cause of the injury. Hence, I focused on the Yoga *asanas* (postures), which were helping to improve my flexibility. Slowly, after a few months of practice, while meditating, I began to experience subtle involuntary vibrations in my lower body. I immediately enquired with the Yoga teacher, and he explained that my body was adapting. After that day, it happened more frequently. Hence, I started doing

meditation for more extended periods. Sometimes it so happened that what felt like 15 minutes in my experience went beyond an hour in real time. I became aware of my thoughts and my subtle bodily functions, such as my heartbeat and some movements in the gut. I was becoming sensitive to the environment, or, in other words, I would say that my sensing ability or my ability to sense things was becoming better. I was paying more attention to everything. Sometimes I felt that something within me was watching my own body and thought. There was a sudden space between my body and "me". I was able to distinguish between the two. I found myself becoming more curious about things around me. I started asking more questions about myself and about everything around me.

As my curiosity grew, I started reading about cycling, and I learned about the technical aspects. I started participating in all kinds of rides in the city. I was actively involved in the local cycling community and its cycling activities. There were leisure rides on Saturdays, covering around 35 kilometres and exploring the city, its outskirts, lakes, eateries, historical monuments and the like. The pace was slow—that is, approximately 20 to 22 kilometres per hour—to encourage new riders to become used to cycling. There were longer rides for people who wanted to improve or level up their game. Longer rides ranged from 70 kilometres to beyond 100 kilometres on Sundays. The speed was moderate—that is, around 25 kilometres per hour. They were non-stop rides. The group was smaller and consisted of fit and younger riders compared to the leisure rides. And there were night rides planned, especially on full moon nights. It was entirely a different experience altogether riding in the night. The night rides were usually on weekdays. Slowly I improved my cycling skills and was riding around 100–150 kilometres per week.

During this period, my only means of transport was a bicycle, and commuting in the city was a joy. At times, moving faster than the bicycles and cars, and exploring the city with new and faster routes, were fun. Even though I had lived in the city for 20 odd years, only through my bicycle did I experience the city like never before in the first year of my riding. The longest that I have ridden was 135 kilometres. It was a natural progression that led me to the world of "randonneuring" (see also Audax India Randonneurs, n.d.).

Stage 3: Randonneuring and the Research Proposal

I wondered what it took for someone to ride 200 kilometres on an entirely human-powered engine and to complete the distance in 13.5 hours. It was similar to what I felt when I ran my first 5 kilometres, then my first 10 kilometres, then my first 21.1 kilometres (a half-marathon), and eventually to the best-known long-distance run—that is, a 42.2 kilometre full marathon. Randonneuring ignited me again, it caught my attention and my focus shifted in that direction. I started researching about randonneuring on the internet and reading the stories of the riders. I was intrigued by the whole format. The shortest distance was 200 kilometres, going all the way up to 1400 kilometres. Hence, I took it as a challenge and registered myself for the Hyderabad city's best-known brevet, "Heaven and Hell 200 BRM", in July 2016 (Airtel Hyderabad Marathon, n.d.). It was a 200 kilometre ride with a pre-determined route, with multiple checkpoints, and opening and closing timings. The ride needed to be finished in 13 and a half hours, which I completed with just 10 minutes to spare, having lost the route and hence riding 15 kilometres more than what was necessary.

At this stage, my supervisor happened to be on leave for a year from the department and was available only online. Honestly, I even contemplated quitting at this stage and questioned whether I were doing the right thing by taking up doctoral study. But, at the right time, I received the much necessary foundational books relevant to anthropology and sport from my friend in the United States of America, which helped to formulate my research proposal, plan my fieldwork and equip me with the necessary tools and techniques for success. As a result, I presented my proposal in the department, and I stepped into my active stage of fieldwork.

Stage 4: Fieldwork

Passive Stage

The passive stage can be seen as a process of becoming acquainted and building rapport with the participants. The initial focus is on establishing relationships with participants and recognising the informants. This stage is further divided into two phases. In the first phase, I moved from being a beginner or novice to learning about the bicycle, its components and becoming acquainted with cycling terminology, and at the same time engaging with the community in the city and participating in most of the rides. The second phase included conducting a pilot study and becoming

a "Randonneur" (any cyclist who has completed a brevet). A brevet is an alternative name for a randonneuring event that starts from a distance of 200 kilometres. The pilot study aimed to test the feasibility of the research work in a chosen field area. The passive stage was approximately two years, which helped to build the necessary skill set physically (in order to ride 200 to 600 kilometres), and also to prepare the required tools for data collection—that is, the interview questionnaires.

Active Stage

I was entering the field as a cycling anthropologist. Here I had an advantage as most of the regular cyclists in the city had already known me as a cyclist and thought of me as a fellow rider. Only later, after the ride, did they identify me as an anthropologist. In some instances, my fellow cyclists asked questions regarding my work. Also outside the riding environment I asked for their consent to probe further for research purposes.

Apart from the "passive stage", the "active stage" of the fieldwork was conducted in three phases for the entire randonneuring season (November 2017–October 2018). In the first phase, I was a Randonneur, a rider experiencing the various stages of the randonneuring, and I became a "Super Randonneur" (any rider who has completed 200, 300, 400 or 600 kilometres in a single randonneuring season). In the second phase, I was a volunteer—that is, I was helping the riders responsible for conducting the brevets. This enabled my researcher self to experience the other side of randonneuring—that is, what goes into organising a brevet. The third phase (conducting in-depth interviews) was undertaken between the brevets as there were three weeks of a gap from one to the other. As a result, I conducted 25 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the "Super Randonneurs", spanning two to four hours each. These were further analysed.

Physical Activity in Numbers

In order to provide some perspective, I compiled Tables 17.1–17.4 from data taken from fitness applications and fitness trackers.

After completing my 300, 400 and 600 kilometre brevets, I volunteered for the 1000 kilometre brevet, and I had an opportunity to ride the 120 kilometre forest section of the route. Unknowingly, I received two King of the Mountain (KOMs) for the two climbing segments in an App called "STRAVA", which is primarily used to track fitness activities and

Table 17.1   Cycling activity during the doctoral study

Year	2016 (July–December)	2017	2018	2019 (only commutes)
Distance (km)	3147.8	3879.0	2418.1	1328.4
Time (HH:MM)	147:40	184:22	119:44	75:06
Elevation gain (m)	15,973	25,286	14,802	10,813
Rides	183	298	169	192

Table 17.2   Cycling data during the active stage: Phase 1 (R to SR) of fieldwork

Months	November 2017	December 2017	January 2018	February 2018
Distance (km)	636.8	1095.2	910.2	431.3
Time (HH:MM)	29:54	48:40	44:35	24:04
Elevation gain (m)	4385	8077	4681	2220

Table 17.3   Cycling monthly average (approx.) during fieldwork (includes commutes)

	2016 (July–December)	2017	2018
Avg. distance/month	(525 kms)	(323 kms)	(202 kms)
Avg. time/month	(25 hrs)	(15 hrs)	(10 hrs)
Avg. rides/month	(30 rides)	(25 rides)	(14 rides)

Table 17.4   Running activity during the doctoral study

Year	2016 (July–December)	2017	2018	2019
Distance (kms)	15.7	576.5	1050.6	594.6
Time (HH:MM)	1:44	53:58	91:25	49:40
Elevation gain (m)	143	2162	4525	3029
Runs	4	53	111	76

social networking for runners and cyclists. Simply, KOM means the fastest rider in that given segment. Hence, I celebrated the KOM with the famous bamboo chicken curry on top of the mountain with the organiser of the ride and a co-volunteer from the brevet. And that happened to be my last non-vegetarian meal. I turned vegetarian after that, which was part of my ongoing experimental process with various foods.

Just when I had finished my fieldwork, I was presented with a unique opportunity to be a tour coordinator of part of a project known as "Tour de Heritage" ("Tour de Heritage", 2018), the first of its kind. The tourism department of the Government of Andhra Pradesh, in association with Wizcraft International Entertainment Pvt. Ltd. and The Bike Affair, organised a 21 day (16 November–7 December 2018) tour with a selected 21 cyclists to cover 2100 kilometres through all the 13 districts of Andhra Pradesh to promote the state as a destination for tourism. Considering the distance and the challenges, most of the cyclists selected were Randonneurs, who were already well-known for their endurance and camaraderie.

Stage 5: The Writing

I was continuing my Yoga sessions and started running again. I could see myself slowly becoming more process-oriented, loving the process instead of focusing on the results. For example, I could see the change in my experience of running. Previously, I was always looking forward to breaking my previous records, pushing myself every day, stressed and exhausted, but I now enjoyed the environment, listening to the birds, being more relaxed after a long run and simply living in the present. In addition, my anxiety and nervousness have reduced dramatically.

Yoga and running helped me to focus on writing mentally and physically, which requires clarity of thought and strength for my back muscles to sit in front of the laptop for hours. Yoga made me pay attention to the subtle functions in the body that are fundamental to life, such as the breath. I now understood subtle changes and movements in my body. As a result, I have become far more flexible and sensitive in that my ability to sense things has improved.

During this period, my reading and writing have enhanced quite drastically. I attended a ten-day workshop, presented a paper on randonneuring in a national seminar, co-authored a chapter in an edited book published by an internationally renowned publisher, and worked on my thesis and other research articles.

The Personality Test

During my fieldwork, I realised that randonneuring and any other endurance activity require certain qualities and characteristics. I therefore wondered whether it has anything to do with my personality. After looking

into some research articles, and especially after reading the book authored by Susan Cain (2012) entitled *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking*, I was prompted to examine the nature of personalities and personality tests. I immediately took the widely known Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) questionnaire on an online website. The results showed that I was part of what they called the type "INFJ" (introverted, intuitive, feeling, and judging), which is also referred to as the "advocate" under the diplomats section, and which was summed up as "Quiet and mystical, yet very inspiring and tireless idealists" (INFJ Personality, 2011–2021). It is said to be one of the rarest profiles, with only one to three per cent of the population exhibiting that personality type. It intrigued me, and I went through the entire eight pages of results, and honestly I felt that I really understood myself to the core for the first time in my life. Reading the book and taking the personality test further helped me remarkably to understand my "self".

OTHER CHANGES AND OBSERVATIONS

From a young age, I have realised that finding people with integrity is a rarity. Hence, trusting someone was a tricky thing. I started to observe their actions rather than believing their words. Even I "walked the talk" and let my actions speak, leading to significant challenges in later life regarding speaking, especially public speaking. I used to converse seldom with others during my graduation and master's days. I was cynical, often angry and stressed out in public spaces. Running gave me a way to let out my stress—hence, I was addicted to distance running. I also felt a deep connection with Japanese manga. For five years before getting into the doctoral programme, apart from the time spent in classes, one would find me either in a sports complex or sitting in front of my laptop reading manga or watching Japanese anime or movies. These helped me to express concepts that were otherwise difficult for me to voice. I feel that I have only recently started speaking, reading and opening to the running and cycling groups. This, in turn, has helped my research processes. I feel that this is again an after effect of Yoga.

Other significant changes would be practising vegetarianism in the past three years, being conscious of my footprint on the earth by reducing consumption in every possible way (eating two meals a day), using a cycle for commuting and practising a minimalist lifestyle. In addition, I made

spaces for the birds to breed, and I started to take a small step towards making my room a little greener by taking care of a few plants and reusing plastic.

Inner Engineering

In 2016, one of my teachers suggested that I read the book entitled *Inner Engineering: A Yogi's Guide to Joy* (Sadhguru, 2016). The insights of the author, Sadhguru (also known as Jaggi Vasudev), had a profound effect on me. It made me raise several questions about the nature of human beings, life and existence itself. I began listening to his programmes.

Since then, I have been doing only Yoga, and I have experienced emptiness, nothingness or a state of timelessness, if I may call it so—starting to look at the world in a new light and beginning to realise what it really means to be a human being with immense possibilities. I am slowly becoming life-sensitive.

Since Then … Only Yoga

Having practised Yoga as a complementary activity to running and cycling for the past few years, for the first time, I was doing only Yoga, and I continued doing it for at least six to eight months to see which changes it would bring to me physically and mentally. I have already started seeing some visible, physical changes in terms of flexibility and increased energy. Another important observation in practising Yoga every day is that I pay attention to subtle changes in the body, which helps to recognise and eliminate the problem at the initial change itself. For example, I am especially able to take care of the stiffness in my back muscles because of sitting in a chair for hours at a time, and to relax the strain in my eyes because of an increase in screen time that is necessary for the doctoral process. Most importantly, I am able to recognise the difference in my weight, even if it is by 500 grams; this helps me to balance my diet accordingly to keep my health in check. Another important aspect that I would like to acknowledge is the material necessary for engaging in the activities. All that Yoga needs is a Yoga mat and a little space. This is much less than is required for running (which needs shoes as well as space outside) and cycling (with all the cycling gear). In terms of energy expenditure, too, Yoga actually helps to increase life energies, unlike the other activities that decrease existing energies.

Conclusion

The doctoral journey undoubtedly ignited my quest to know, to question things that are taken for granted, to frame meaningful arguments, to articulate relevant ideas and to understand each and every step of the process. This helps in knowing the importance of the parts as well as the sum of the parts, and in seeing the bigger picture. It can now be considered a paradigm shift, as most scientists agree that everything in the universe is a play of energy at the fundamental level.

This openness has led me to the great thinkers and the teachings of Lao Tzu (Dyer, 2016), Gautama—the Buddha, Jiddu Krishnamurti (Krishnamurti, n.d.), Alan Watts and other philosophers through various blog posts and YouTube videos. These have further made me realise the importance of nothingness, thoughtlessness and silence, and how solitude can be powerful. A Zen poem explains this beautifully: "When you speak, it is silent, and when you are silent, it speaks" (Chase, 2015, n.p.).

I am grateful and privileged to have had this transformational opportunity. All this was possible because of the environment and the mental space provided through entry into the doctoral programme. No number of words or expressions will do justice to the experience that I have had in my doctoral journey. As a result, I am much more inclusive and open than ever before in my life.

I am presently practising what the ancient Chinese philosophers called the "Wu Wei", which can be understood as "the principle of not forcing" or "the art of effortless action" (Dyer, 2016). All of this has given me a vision for life. I want to emphasise a teaching from Tich Nhat Hanh, who said, "There is no way to happiness; happiness is the way" (Goldstein, 2012, n.p.). This will be the end of my doctoral story, and I would like to end this chapter with a fun fact. My name is "Vinod", which is of a Sanskrit origin and means "happiness". Therefore, I say, "I am just trying to live up to my name".

References

Airtel Hyderabad Marathon. (n.d.). https://www.hyderabadrunners.com/ahm/
Audax India Randonneurs. (n.d.). https://www.audaxindia.in
Cain, S. (2012). *Quiet: The power of introverts in a world that can't stop talking.* Crown Publishers.
Campbell, P. (2019). Goal setting to the now. https://financialrhythm.com/goal-setting-to-the-now/.

Chase, C. (2015). The real 'you' comes and goes—Alan Watts. https://creative-systemsthinking.wordpress.com/2015/04/11/the-real-you-comes-and-goes-alan-watts/.

Dyer, W. W. (2016). *Change your thoughts, change your life: Living the wisdom of the Tao*. Hay House India.

Goldstein, E. (2012). There is no way to happiness; Happiness is the way. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/happiness-tips_b_1652776.

Graham, D. W. (2021). Heraclitus. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heraclitus/.

INFJ Personality. (2011–2021). NERIS Analytics Limited. https://www.16personalities.com/infj-personality

Jobs, S. (2005). You've got to find what you love. Jobs says. https://news.stanford.edu/2005/06/14/jobs-061505/.

Krishnamurti, J. (n.d.). Krishnamurti Foundation Trust.

McCallum, T. (2019). Life can only be understood backwrds, but it must be lived forwards. https://tommccallum.medium.com/life-can-only-be-understood-backwards-but-it-must-be-lived-forwards-7217747f5e09.

Sadhguru. (2016). *Inner engineering: A yogi's guide to joy*. Penguin Random House India.

Sands, R. R. (2002). Sport ethnography. Human Kinetics.

"Tour de Heritage". (2018). 20 day cycling journey managed by Wizcraft to highlight Andhra Pradesh's culture. https://www.eventfaqs.com/news/ef-15637/tour-de-heritage-20-day-cycling-journey-managed-by-wizcraft-to-highlight-andhra-pradeshs-culture

Tsangwinglun. (2016). *The truth behind 'You don't know what you have unitl it's gone'*. https://tsangwinglun.wordpress.com/2016/08/06/the-truth-behind-you-dont-know-what-you-have-until-its-gone/

UGC ACT 1956. (n.d.). https://www.ugc.ac.in/page/UGC-ACT-1956.aspx

Yoga Sutra Explained: Absolute Focus. (2018). Isha Forest Flower, *6*(8).

Concluding the Doctorate: Introduction

Naomi Ryan And Patrick Alan Danaher

The chapters in the last section of this book present information about the conclusion of the doctorate. Not all universities follow similar protocols around the examination of the thesis. For some students, this phase involves an anxious wait for the examiners' reports that signals no revisions necessary, or else revisions of varying kinds. These revisions (if necessary) are duly executed and the thesis is then passed on to a collegial review process that assesses the worthiness of the responses to the external examiners' comments.

Other universities require an oral defence, commonly referred to as a viva. In Chap. 18, Fiona Charlton and Peter Smith acknowledge the trepidation with which students hold this end task. The authors present a qualitative study of 12 graduated doctoral student experiences, and they provide a five-point summary of useful strategies that may allay fears around this oral examination.

In Chap. 19, Daniel Ferreira and Robin Throne interrogate postdoctoral researcher positionality by presenting an innovative duoethnography of the experiences of two doctoral alumni and a doctoral supervisor. They call for further inquiry into and analysis of the agentic and agentive characteristics of doctoral research agency when applied to new researchers and their relationships with their supervisors. This call is timely, given the centrality of agency to the necessary contributions to successfully completed doctoral studies by students and supervisors alike. Such agency is

vital also to animating and energising doctoral students' postdoctoral career and research trajectories.

Finally, in concluding the book, Deborah L. Mulligan and Naomi Ryan outline a broader perspective on doctoral study and supervision, clustered around past, present and potential future understandings of deconstructed doctoral discourses. These understandings are encapsulated in a catalogue of current informative and supportive resources of highly diverse types, as well as opportunities for sharing research findings and best practice stories and strategies that are available to doctoral students and supervisors to facilitate their work and to enhance their success.

The Doctoral Viva: Defence or Celebration?

Fiona Charlton and Peter Smith

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a mixed methods study of the oral examination experiences of 19 doctoral graduates. The aim of the study is to provide a better understanding and analysis of doctoral graduates' experiences of their viva: how they prepared, their experience of the viva itself, outcomes and reflections. The chapter is organised as follows. The next section presents a brief literature review of scholarly works that discuss the oral examination process. This is followed by a presentation and discussion of the methodological approach, including the ethical protocol followed. The results of the study are then presented and discussed. Finally, the chapter ends with a short conclusion, drawing together the findings.

F. Charlton • P. Smith (✉)
University of Sunderland, Sunderland, UK
e-mail: peter.smith@sunderland.ac.uk

Literature Review of Research About the Doctoral Examination Process

Much research has been undertaken about the nature of the doctoral viva, and the entire examination process (Smith, 2014). Such research covers the variability of the oral examination process (Tinkler & Jackson, 2000, 2004); the importance of selecting the correct doctoral examiners (Joyner, 2003; Newell, 2021); the personal experiences of doctoral candidates of the examination process (Wallace, 2003); and standards of the doctoral thesis and the examination process (Carter, 2008; Carter & Whittaker, 2009; Morley et al., 2002).

Carter and Whittaker (2009) discussed how the individual nature of the doctoral thesis suggests that examining a doctoral candidate "remains challenging and is surrounded by different agendas, ideologies and practices". Morley et al. (2002) discussed quality assurance procedures and regulations and how these impact upon the assessment of doctoral candidates. Tinkler and Jackson (2000) undertook research into the practice of doctoral supervision and assessment at 20 British universities, in an attempt to illuminate the doctoral examination process. Their research found that there is significant diversity in the way in which regulations and policies are operationalised and implemented, and that this can influence examination processes. Alexander and Davis (2019) discussed how the PhD process is "under pressure" from an examiner's viewpoint. Nir and Bogler (2021) focused on international examiners' participation of the viva, posing the question: "Is it a ritual or an actual indicator of research quality?"

Exploring other aspects of the viva process, Hartley and Fox (2004) discussed the importance of having a practice (mock) viva, while Holbrook et al. (2007) analysed the ways in which examiners assess candidates' literature reviews. Wellington (2010) and Hodgson (2020) investigated how students best prepared for their oral examination and candidates' preconceptions of the viva. Degtyareva and Lantsoght (2021) highlighted different means of planning for, and ultimately succeeding in, the PhD "defence" by providing what they termed "a global toolbox for success".

Covering further dimensions of the viva, the importance of selecting the correct examiners was discussed by Joyner (2003), who concluded that there are two important aspects of the selection of doctoral examiners. Firstly, subject expertise is, of course, paramount in judging the academic standard of the thesis and whether it makes a significant contribution to knowledge, which is the prime select measure of doctoral standard.

Secondly, "this should also be mature adults, of enough humanity to ensure that the examination process is a worthwhile and developmental experience for the candidate, irrespective of the outcome". Such wisdom and maturity come with experience, and are typically found in examiners who have examined a significant number of candidates.

In 2003, Wallace analysed the language that successful doctoral candidates used to describe their oral examination. Wallace researched the actual conduct of PhD vivas and found that some candidates employed imagery and metaphor relating to sport and competition, while others discussed the examination process in terms of interrogation and even imprisonment. The research went on to explore the nature of the viva and of the examiners, concluding that the models of sport or interrogation were, or indeed should be, appropriate in the context of the doctoral examination process. Day (2009) also used the analogy of sport to discuss the oral examination process. In a different study, Trafford and Leshem (2009) explored the very nature of what is understood as "doctorateness" and what is really meant by the scholarly nature of this highly esteemed award. Mullins and Kiley (2002) reminded us that "It's a PhD, not a Nobel Prize!" (p. 369), thus putting into context the importance of being realistic in assessing a candidate's "contribution to knowledge". Morgan (2022) provided an autobiographical account of his own experiences during the PhD viva "ritual".

Johnson (2005) discussed the nature of doctoral assessment within the context of the professional doctorate. This research raised concerns around the ability of academic examiners to interrogate practice-led research about the nature of professional contributions to knowledge. This aspect was further explored by Sanders and Smith (2013), who proposed an alternative, and somewhat controversial, model for the examination of professional doctorate candidates that included a professional examiner, drawn from the practice of the candidate, to explore and examine the professional aspects and contribution of the doctoral candidate. Pearce devoted an entire book (2005) to the PhD assessment process, discussing the procedure and scholarly role of examiners, how they go about examining a thesis and the relationship among examiners, the candidate and the thesis. In his book entitled *The PhD Viva*, Smith (2014) analysed case studies of candidates and other aspects of the doctoral examination process to provide a text that guided candidates through their examination.

To summarise, there is a plethora of existing research focusing on the doctorate, the thesis and the viva. However, very little research has been

undertaken into candidates' views of the examination process. This chapter adds to the body of knowledge about the doctoral examination process by exploring the narratives of doctoral candidates in relation to their viva experiences.

Methodology

The approach taken was a mixed methods survey (Axinn & Pearce, 2006), which utilised a questionnaire as the survey instrument. The questionnaire collected both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data measured aspects relating to the doctoral process, while the qualitative data took the form of narrative accounts, written by doctoral candidates, of their oral examination experiences. The survey instrument was piloted on ten candidates who had recently undertaken their viva and was revised accordingly. Ethical approval for the study was sought and received, and the protocol followed included informed consent, anonymity and the right to withdraw from the research.

The final version of the questionnaire was sent to 25 doctoral candidates who had completed the viva process in the United Kingdom, Ireland and Hong Kong. One of the authors (Smith, 2014) has examined and supervised in all of these countries; the process, regulations and nature of the viva are similar throughout. Candidates were also invited to pass the questionnaire to others who had undertaken an oral examination, thereby using a snowballing process (Christopoulos, 2009) to obtain the data. All respondents were provided with full information as to the nature and purpose of the survey. It was made clear that they were under no obligation to participate.

The ethical protocol established by Houghton et al. (2010) was followed. Respondents were assured that all data would be anonymised, and that only extracts from their responses would be used in the final chapter. It was specified that the data would not be shared with any third parties, and would be held securely for the period of the study—that is, until the end of February 2020, after which all data were destroyed. Respondents were provided with a contact point with whom they could raise concerns or questions about the privacy of the study. No respondents elected to do so.

Respondents were requested to provide short narrative accounts, and were asked: "Please be as honest and detailed as you can in your responses.

The more you can tell us about your own experiences, the better we will be able to paint a true picture of students' views of the viva."

The following questions were posed:

1. *In the weeks before the viva. Please tell us about the preparations that you made prior to the viva.*

    How did you prepare? Did you reread your thesis? Did you prepare answers to "standard questions"? Did anyone advise you? Did your supervisors give advice? Was there anything that you read that was useful?

2. *The mock viva. Tell us about your experiences in the mock.*

    Did you have a mock viva? What form did it take? Did you find it useful? Did it prepare you well for the real event? Did it reassure you, or worry you?

3. *The night before the viva, and the morning of the viva. Please tell us how you prepared and how you felt.*

    Did you do anything to prepare the evening before? How did you feel on the day of the viva?

4. *The viva itself. Please tell us as much as you can about the viva itself.*

    How did you find it? Did you enjoy the discussion? Was it what you expected? What was the opening question? How did the examiners approach the questions? Did they ask general questions? Did they go through page by page? Were the questions what you expected? How long did it last? How did it close?

5. *The outcome of the viva. Please tell us about this.*

    How was it relayed to you? How long did you wait? What was the outcome? How did you feel?

6. *After the viva. Please tell us what happened between the viva and graduation.*

    How did you feel after the viva? Relieved? Disappointed? At a "loose end"? Did you have any corrections to make? How were these relayed to you? Were they clear? How did you approach them? How much help did you need, and get, from your supervisors? How did you feel when the degree was finally confirmed?

7. *Any advice that you would give to other students?*

    What are the most important pieces of advice that you would give to fellow students preparing for their viva? Is there anything that you would change about the way that you approached the viva? Is

there anything else that you have not included above that you think would be of use to other students?

Results

The results of the survey are presented in Table 18.1.

Table 18.1 shows the preparations that respondents made in the weeks before the viva. Of the 19 respondents, the majority (17) reported reading through their thesis in the weeks before the viva, 11 considered/practised standard questions and four prepared PowerPoint presentations. Three respondents said that they spoke with colleagues or friends who had experienced a viva, and three read through literature and/or guidance about the viva process. Other interesting preparations included meeting/speaking with supervisors and researching the panel members/examiners.

Comments included:

> "I read through the thesis several times, which was not always easy. I had a tendency to skip over paragraphs, perhaps thinking, 'Why am I doing this? I wrote this; I know what I wrote already'".
> "I also compiled some notes and made a list of possible questions and answers the examiners might ask".
> "I made a short presentation of about 10 slides—more to provide an overview and introduction to the conversation. Very top level".
> "I discussed the process with people who had just gone through it".
> "I read Smith's book *PhD Viva: How to Prepare for Your Oral Examination*."

Table 18.2 shows the experiences of those respondents who had a mock viva. Of the 13 respondents who participated in a mock viva, the following comments were made about the experience:

Table 18.1 Preparation prior to the viva

Preparation	Responses
Reread thesis	19
Prepared practice/standard questions	11
Prepared a PowerPoint presentation	4
Spoke with colleagues or friends who had experienced a viva	3
Read literature/guidance about vivas	3

Table 18.2 Experience of the mock viva

Question	Responses
How many respondents had a mock viva?	13
How many respondents did not have a mock viva?	6
How many respondents found the mock viva useful?	12
How many respondents did not find the mock viva useful?	1

Please tell us about your experiences of the mock (practice) viva (if you had one)

Table 18.3 Preparations for the viva

Question	Responses
How many respondents prepare the night before? If they prepared, what did they do?	13
	8—read through thesis
	1—met supervisor
	2—prepared psychologically
	2—practised presentation

Please tell us how you prepared for the viva the night and morning before

> "I found it intense, intimidating and very useful."
> "The mock viva did not prepare me for the event; it was passive and did not challenge me on some of my assumptions which were then pulled apart in the viva. The mock gave me a false sense of security."
> "It was extremely reassuring because the 'examiners' clearly understood my thesis, asked in depth questions that made me consider my answers carefully and gave me areas to practise before the real viva."
> "I was less worried after the mock viva than I had been before it."

Table 18.3 outlines the number of respondents who prepared for the viva the night/morning before, and what they did to prepare. Interestingly, only 13 respondents reported preparing the night/morning before the viva. Given that 17 reported reading through their thesis in the weeks leading up to the viva, only eight of the respondents read through their thesis the night/morning before in preparation. Two respondents prepared themselves psychologically (calming their nerves and focusing on positive thoughts; having a good night's sleep), and two practised the presentations that they had prepared. One respondent met with her or his

supervisor in a pub the night before the viva. One particularly interesting comment was:

> "The day of the viva was awful. There are no other words to describe it. It was like 100 nightmares rolled into one, for so many reasons."
> Other comments included:
> "Felt pretty excited on that day as I had waited for almost four years to come, and also everything would just boil down to that single day itself."
> "I had a good night's sleep to get ready for the following day's examination, as it needs a lot of psychological/mental presence and physical aptitude to face the big ordeal."
> "No [I didn't prepare]; I was prepared weeks before."

Table 18.4 reviews the experience and the length of the respondents' vivas. Nine of the respondents reported enjoying their viva experience, six did not enjoy their experience and four respondents did not say if they did or did not enjoy the experience. Seven respondents claimed that the viva was as they expected it to be.

Just over 50% (nine) of the vivas lasted less than two hours, eight lasted between two and four hours, and two lasted more than four hours. The shortest viva lasted less than one hour, and the longest lasted six hours (from 8.00 am to 2.00 pm). The two vivas that lasted more than four hours were reported by those respondents who enjoyed the viva and the discussion with the panel.

The following quotations demonstrated the thoughts/experiences of the respondents:

> "Enjoyed it thoroughly as this is part of the whole learning journey and process, culminating with this final part of the whole research work."

Table 18.4 The viva experience

Question	Responses
How many respondents enjoyed the viva?	9
How many respondents did not enjoy the viva?	6
How many respondents said that it was what they expected?	7
How long did the viva last?	9 – < 2 hours
	8–2 hour—4 hours
	2 – > 4 hours

Please tell us about your actual viva experience

"At the time I found it a difficult and nerve wrecking experience; however, looking [back] and reflecting upon the experience I feel the viva and the recommendations allowed my final submitted thesis to be clearer theoretically, and my methodology to be clearer."

"I found the viva less stressful than I had expected. To my surprise I did enjoy parts of the discussion."

"The discussion was not at all what I expected. It was much more focused on the examiner's interests rather than the main thrust of the thesis."

"Most of the questions were general questions but relevant to my thesis. The opening question was on what the reason for the research was and give a summary of what I have done and how it was done. The next questions were based on specific pages as the examiners moved from page to page."

"The viva lasted barely an hour. Compounded with the inevitable nerves, was I to take this as a good or bad sign? Nobody had advised me about this."

Table 18.5 outlines the outcome of the viva for the respondents. The majority (17) of the respondents reported being told of the outcome on the day of the viva——14 were called back into the room after a short recess, and two were told at the end of the viva meeting. The same majority (17) of the respondents passed with minor corrections, one had one minor correction and one had major corrections.

The respondent who received a single correction had not had a mock viva and prepared by rereading the thesis before the viva. This respondent enjoyed the viva experience and reported that it was what had been expected.

The respondent who received major corrections commented as follows:

Table 18.5   The outcome of the viva

Question	*Responses*
How were respondents told of the outcome of the viva?	14—called back in after
	2—at end of viva
	3—didn't specify
Who told the respondents the outcome of the viva?	2—via email
	3—chairperson
	1—external examiner
	13—didn't specify
What was the outcome of the viva?	17—minor corrections
	1—a single correction
	1—major corrections

Please tell us about the outcome of your viva

"I was informed by the chair after they spent over an hour discussing. I was given major corrections. I was heartbroken and disappointed because I felt they were imposing their view and position and not respected my position within the thesis."

Other comments included:

"The outcome was minor corrections as expected. What I didn't expect was that it would take a further 18 months and several re-submissions to solve the remaining challenges."

"I was told at the end that the recommendation would be that I should be awarded the doctorate, subject to a few minor corrections which could be to the internal examiner only for final approval."

Table 18.6 outlines the aftermath of the viva, how respondents felt and how many had corrections. Just over 50% (10) of the respondents felt relieved after their viva, adding some of the following comments:

"Very relieved but it took some time to sink in. My list of corrections was not particularly taxing but not what I would have ideally wanted. I was advised to set my pride to one side and do what had been asked."

"I felt completely relieved, satiated and elated when the degree was finally confirmed."

"I felt relieved that the process was nearly over. The corrections required were made very clear to me by the examiner and I stayed back on campus prior to flying home for several additional days to make the changes and take advantage of my supervisor's input."

All 19 respondents had corrections to complete following the viva and in order formally to be awarded their doctorate.

Table 18.6 After the viva

Question	Responses
How did respondents feel after the viva?	10—relieved
	1—disappointed/numb
	1—loose end/lost
	3—achievement
	4—didn't specify
How many respondents had corrections?	19

Please tell us what happened after your viva and before graduation

Table 18.7 Advice to other doctoral students

Advice	Responses
Have a mock viva	7
Go through and know your thesis in detail	7
Prepared a presentation of main points to guide you	4
Prepare possible questions and answers	3
Speak to people who have experienced a viva	2

Please tell us about any advice that you would give to other students

Table 18.7 outlines the advice that respondents said that they would give to other doctoral students. The advice that the respondents said that they would give to other students mirrored the responses given to Question 1, when they were asked how they had prepared in the weeks prior to the viva, although the numbers differed.

Although 13 of the respondents had a mock viva, seven suggested that students should have one prior to their viva, and seven also suggested that students read through and know their thesis in detail. Four of the respondents recommended preparing a presentation for the viva, and three recommended considering/preparing possible questions and answers. Two respondents advised that students speak with someone who had had a viva and could share their experiences and learning.

Other examples of advice given included having confidence in yourself and your work, being aware of limitations and future work in relation to your project, and relaxing and enjoying the journey.

Comments included:

> "Given my circumstances, there was not an awful lot more I could have done in terms of preparation except for one thing. I would have tried much harder to insist on a mock viva."
> "Just go through the whole research work several times focusing more on the main aims and objectives of the study, choice of methods used and rationale for it, the outcome of the study and whether objectives were met or not."
> "I believe that, if a student is genuinely ready to finish a doctorate, they will have attained a level of confidence in their own knowledge, experience and an unshakeable belief in their work. I think the best advice is therefore not to rush to the finish line, but to enjoy the journey."

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a mixed methods study into the views of doctoral graduates concerning their oral examination, otherwise known as the viva. Unlike previous studies, the authors have focused on all aspects of the viva process, including preparations, experiences of the examination itself, the outcome and the reflections that might benefit others who are preparing for their own viva. The findings thus illuminate the viva process, which is often shrouded in mystery.

In terms of preparing for the viva, the majority of respondents reported rereading their thesis in detail and working through standard questions. Most respondents had a mock, or practice, viva, and the majority found this to be of use, although several stated that it did not resemble their real examination. It is important to stress to candidates that any practice viva should be considered to be a mock run of the process, and that it is not possible to predict the real questions that individual examiners will choose to pose (Smith, 2014). The majority of respondents reported spending some time the night before preparing for their viva; however, a number simply rested. More graduates enjoyed their viva experience than not, and several reported that it was what they had expected. In terms of length of time, this varied from less than two hours (nine respondents) to greater than four hours (two respondents), with one respondent reporting that the examination lasted six hours.

The majority of respondents were asked to make minor corrections to the thesis, with only one respondent being required to make major corrections. The respondents made a number of recommendations to candidates who are about to undertake their own oral examination, including: have a practice viva, read your thesis until you know it in detail and speak to others who have been through the viva experience so that they can learn from recent graduates.

The main points of learning for those approaching their viva are thus:

- It is important to have a practice viva.
- Most candidates enjoy their viva, so please look forward to yours.
- Prepare for your viva; read your thesis until you know it in detail.
- Most students pass with minor corrections.
- Those who do have to make major changes almost always pass in the end.

Pleasingly, it does seem that for the majority of candidates the viva is a pleasurable experience and not a "defence" to be feared. The authors hope that this chapter is of use to those who are about to undergo their own oral examination.

References

Alexander, D. E., & Davis, I. R. (2019). The PhD system under pressure: An examiner's viewpoint. *Quality Assurance in Education, 27*(1), 2–12. https://doi.org/10.1108/QAE-04-2018-0033

Axinn, W. G., & Pearce, L. D. (2006). *Mixed method data collection strategies.* Cambridge University Press.

Carter, S. (2008). Examining the doctoral thesis: A discussion. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 45*(4), 365–374. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703290802377208

Carter, B., & Whittaker, K. (2009). Examining the British PhD viva: Opening new doors or scarring for life? *Contemporary Nurse, 32*(1–2), 169–178. https://doi.org/10.5172/conu.32.1-2.169

Christopoulos, D. (2009). Peer esteem snowballing: A methodology for expert surveys. In *Eurostat conference for new techniques and technologies for statistics* (pp. 171–179).

Day, M. (2009). Clearing the final hurdle: The PhD viva. *Sport and Exercise Psychology Review, 5*(2), 54.

Degtyareva, O., & Lantsoght, E. O. (2021). *Planning and passing your PhD defence: A global toolbox for success.* Routledge.

Hartley, J., & Fox, C. (2004). Assessing the mock viva: The experiences of British doctoral students. *Studies in Higher Education, 29*(6), 727–738. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070420007221

Hodgson, D. (2020). Helping doctoral students understand PhD thesis examination expectations: A framework and a tool for supervision. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 21*(1), 51–63. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787417742020

Holbrook, A., Bourke, S., Fairbairn, H., & Lovat, T. (2007). Examiner comment on the literature review in Ph.D. theses. *Studies in Higher Education, 32*(3), 337–356. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070701346899

Houghton, C. E., Casey, D., Shaw, D., & Murphy, K. (2010). Ethical challenges in qualitative research: Examples from practice. *Nurse Researcher, 18*(1), 15–25. https://doi.org/10.7748/nr2010.10.18.1.15.c8044

Johnson, D. (2005). Assessment matters: Some issues concerning the supervision and assessment of work-based doctorates. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 42*(1), 87–92. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703290500048994

Joyner, R. W. (2003). The selection of external examiners for research degrees. *Quality Assurance in Education, 11*(2), 123–127. https://doi.org/10.1108/09684880310471551

Morgan, D. H. J. (2022). The PhD viva ritual: A critical autobiographical account. In R. Twinley & G. Letherby (Eds.), *The doctoral journey as an emotional, embodied, political experience* (pp. 127–133). Routledge.

Morley, L., Leonard, D., & David, M. (2002). Variations in vivas: Quality and equality in British PhD assessments. *Studies in Higher Education, 27*(3), 263–273. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070220000653

Mullins, G., & Kiley, M. (2002). "It's a PhD, not a Nobel Prize": How experienced examiners assess research theses. *Studies in Higher Education, 27*(4), 369–386. https://doi.org/10.1080/0307507022000011507

Newell, G. (2021). Editorial: The constructive and supportive PhD examiner. *Journal of Property Investment & Finance, 39*(4), 297. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPIF-07-2021-177

Nir, A., & Bogler, R. (2021). International examiners' participation of the Viva: A ritual or an actual indicator of research quality? *Quality Assurance in Education, 29*(2/3), 183–197. https://doi.org/10.1108/QAE-01-2021-0005

Pearce, L. (2005). *How to examine a thesis.* Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.

Sanders, G., & Smith P. (2013). *An alternative approach to the assessment of professional doctorate candidates.* Paper presented at the international conference on developments, doctoral education and training, UK Council for Graduate Education, Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh, UK. http://www.ukcge.ac.uk/main.php?main=1627&Conference=International%20Conference%20on%20Developments%20in%20Doctoral%20Education%20and%20Training

Smith, P. (2014). *The PhD viva: A text for students.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Tinkler, P., & Jackson, C. (2000). Examining the doctorate: Institutional policy and the PhD examination process in Britain. *Studies in Higher Education, 25*(2), 167–180. https://doi.org/10.1080/713696136

Tinkler, P., & Jackson, C. (2004). *The doctoral examination process: A handbook for students, examiners and supervisors.* Open University Press.

Trafford, V., & Leshem, S. (2009). Doctorateness as a threshold concept. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 46*(3), 305–316. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703290903069027

Wallace, S. (2003). Figuratively speaking: Six accounts of the PhD viva. *Quality Assurance in Education, 11*(2), 100–108.

Wellington, J. (2010). Supporting students' preparation for the viva: Their preconceptions and implications for practice. *Teaching in Higher Education, 15*(1), 71–84. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510903487867

Beyond the Dissertation Manuscript: A Duoethnography of the Elucidation of Doctoral Researcher Agency

Daniel Ferreira and Robin Throne

Introduction

Much attention in U.S. practitioner doctoral programmes is given to the dissertation research manuscript, as well as to the discourses of scholarly writing development for new doctoral researchers. Often, less attention is given to fostering the articulation of the new researcher's positionality and emerging academic identity as a doctoral-level research scholar. Researcher positionality has been defined by the authors as a necessary process of a principal investigator for critical self-reflection and a determination of self within the social constructs, biases, contexts, layers, power structures, identities, transparency, objectivity and subjectivities for the viewpoint assumed within the research. This definition was used foundationally for an analytical

D. Ferreira
Sophia University, Tokyo, Japan

R. Throne (✉)
University of the Cumberlands, Williamsburg, KY, USA

305

view of the research supervisor's agency from a practitioner-based doctoral perspective. "While the literature has expanded in the exploration of student agency, little focus has been given to the construct for research supervisor agency" (Throne et al., 2019) and more specifically for the relationship between the research supervisor and the new researcher, even though the relationship has been reported as critical to doctoral persistence and completion (Rigler et al., 2017). As the authors noted with others previously:

> An evolved doctoral student agency may aid persistence and completion of the doctoral program as well as engagement with the scholarly community and dissemination of graduate research. Other scholars have highlighted the role of doctoral student agency in the attainment of academic careers post-doctorate as well as the strategies and techniques for research supervisors to ensure quality development of agency for their dissertation candidates. (Rigler et al., 2021, p. 64)

Prior work illustrated the importance for how research supervisor agency can foster awareness and the articulation of new researcher positionality to further the development of researcher agency (Throne et al., 2019). The authors found this practice-based approach most specific to online or hybrid doctoral education where new researchers and research supervisors are remote in time and space (Throne et al., 2019; Throne & Walters, 2019). Previously, the authors also noted the need for a more consistent operational definition for research supervisor agency and the personal competencies necessary for a high-mentoring ethos and non-hierarchical doctoral research supervision (Throne et al., 2019). In addition, doctoral research supervision has nuances that can be intentionally used to foster researcher agency when employed. In this chapter, these considerations are considered from the unique lived perspectives of dissertation writing from two vantage points: supervisor and supervisee.

The authors have previously called for continued collaboration to achieve a consistent framework for quality doctoral research supervision of dissertation writing, and this duoethnography allowed the opportunity to revisit artefacts retrospective of the supervision experience to consider the individual insights and combined to facilitate further meaning and insights to improve these aspects of the dissertation writing process to completion more deeply (Throne et al., 2019). The insights gained are evidence of the need to understand doctoral researcher agency better, how it is developed, how the supervisor may foster it and how it is exhibited post-doctorate. Thus, the current literature specific to the supervision of doctoral research

with intentional pedagogical considerations for agency development may enhance research supervision, and is presented in the context of individual explorations of the phenomenon.

In previous work, the authors have stressed that a researcher supervisor and doctoral scholar relationship can be strengthened when "a non-hierarchical relational trust characterized by efficacy, strong mentoring ethos, healthy and diverse communication style, and empathy is established between the research supervisor and the doctoral student" (Throne & Oddi, 2019, p. 184), and may make way for a platform for additional research to augment career advancement (Throne et al., 2019). Likewise, the researcher supervisor's agency can be enhanced through these post-doctorate experiences.

The spatiotemporal nature of the remote supervisor–supervisee relationship can also enable a research supervisor to develop agency to oversee doctoral research to reduce unequal power relationships, and to develop further a high mentoring ethos necessary for the work (Throne et al., 2019; Throne & Oddi, 2018). Communication mechanisms used within online platforms are necessary to this end. This then may lead to non-hierarchical power dynamics and the enhanced understanding of a doctoral researcher's positionality, as well as allowing entrance into the academic community as trust is furthered, whereby the dissertation writer is introduced to the research publishing community. In this approach, research supervisor agency is characterised by efficacy, a strong mentoring ethos, a healthy and diverse communication style, empathy and non-hierarchical relational trust between the research supervisor and the newly independent investigator (Throne et al., 2019).

In addition, the authors have previously considered autoethnography essential to illuminate both the new researcher's emerging positionality and agency and the research supervisor's own agency (Lewis & Throne, 2021):

> When successful, the research supervisor may positively influence the practitioner dissertation writer's journey of self-inquiry of a specific construct from the periphery of the doctoral learning community and bring them to the center of academic life, a continued research agenda, and continued research and scholarly publication post-doctorate. (p. 89)

Thus, this duoethnography sought to illuminate these opportunities from the individual experience and to bridge collaborative insights gained

from the others. When successful, the research supervisor may foster the new researcher's elucidation of researcher agency when engaged prior to, within or after dissertation research. In turn, the elucidation of the insights into research supervisor agency may further enhance the facilitation of the researcher's development to new investigator and scholarly writer. When this is successful, the research supervisor may positively influence the dissertation writer's journey from the periphery of the doctoral learning community to the centre of academic life, a continued research agenda, and continued research and scholarly publication post-doctorate (Sweat et al., 2021).

Retrospective Duoethnography

The duoethnography was founded upon prior critical reviews of the scholarship of doctoral researcher positionality and doctoral research supervisor agency in the context of dissertation research writing and oral defence. In autoethnography and duoethnography, new knowledge is discoverable from the individual lived experience, and may offer societal implications to enhance the meaning of the phenomenon or lead to further insights that may inform others' experiences. In this duoethnography, the lived experiences overlap between doctoral candidates and the research supervisor to illuminate understanding of these constructs that lead to new insights for better understanding and utilisation of narrative explication of researcher positionality within online environments and specific to practitioner doctoral programmes.

A qualitative duoethnographic design was chosen for the study design to allow the collaborators to consider experiences from the dissertation phase of an online Doctor of Education programme, retrospectively, to explore the experiences of researcher positionality and research supervisor agency. Lewis and Throne (2021) called for more doctoral education research using autoethnography and other forms of self-as-subject research:

> Many past researchers have also noted the use of duoethnography, collaborative autoethnography, and other forms of self-as-subject research as a means to support doctoral researchers throughout their dissertation process, even when the use of these methods may not be the dissertation research method. (p. 100)

As such, this study heeded this call to extend the authors' prior auto-ethnographic work (Lewis, 2020; Throne, 2021), and was conducted as a retrospective of the doctoral research experience from 2017 to 2019. The research setting was a 100% online university with a Carnegie classification as Research Doctoral; Professional Dominant with Moderate Research Activity (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2019), and the university is regionally accredited by the WASC Senior College and University Commission.

Artefacts from the past dissertation writing experience were gathered for generative data collection to address one research question:

> RQ: What is the experience of elucidating researcher agency as facilitated by a research supervisor's agency in the dissertation phase of an online Doctor of Education program?

Reflexivity was employed as a collaborative technique to engage the inter-subjective co-author narratives to achieve objective interpretations of study findings in the exploration of relational and emergent understanding of the lived experiences in retrospect (Bissett et al., 2018; Burrington & Throne, 2021). Institutional structures were shared by both researcher-participants, one as research supervisor and the other as doctoral researcher, as the setting in which these experiences are illustrated. Several past researchers, including de Magalhaes et al. (2019), Inouye and McAlpine (2017), Perez et al. (2019) and Shultz et al. (2019), also noted the specific attributes, traits, characteristics and qualities that comprise doctoral student agency that include agentive and agentic attributes (see Fig. 19.1). In addition, institutional structures and strictures, hierarchical and non-hierarchical power dynamics, and other power dynamics have also been shown to influence the awareness, development and use alike of student agency (Pyhalto & Keskinen, 2012; Sobuwa & McKenna, 2019).

The importance of the collaboration between doctoral research and research supervisor was stressed by Sweat et al. (2021), who noted:

> When doctoral students are engaged with their research supervisors within technology-rich and diverse online platforms they may advance the agency required to disseminate practice-based research during the practitioner doctoral program or after graduation. Further, as the practitioner doctoral candidate engages in professional and research opportunities or scholarly publication post-doctorate, ongoing collaborative research with the research
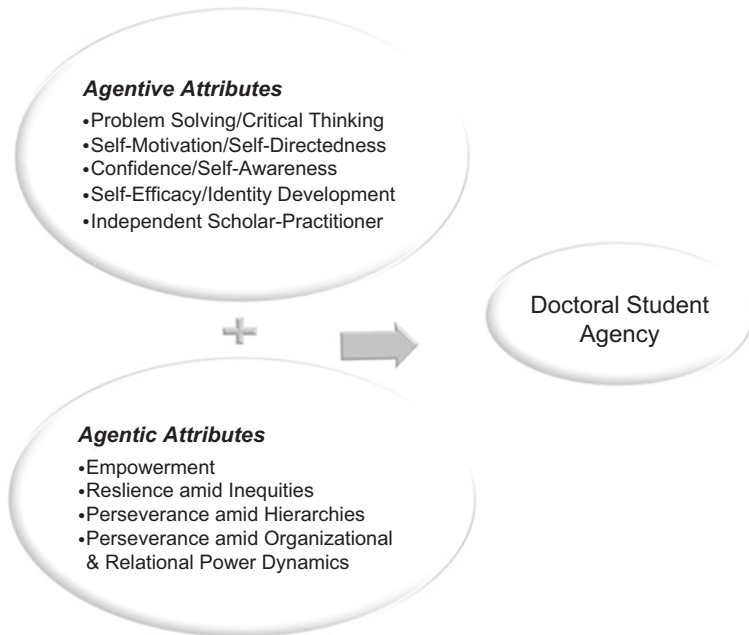
Fig. 19.1 Agentive and agentic attributes of doctoral researcher agency (Sweat et al., 2021). From "Doctoral Practitioner Researcher Agency and the Practice-Based Research Agenda" in R. Throne (Ed.), *Practice-Based and Practice-Led Research for Dissertation Development* (p. 193), 2021, IGI Global. Reprinted with permission.

supervisor has been shown to foster the assimilation of agency to engage an active and pertinent post-doctorate research agenda. (p. 197)

The agentive and agentic characteristics of agency were also employed in the duoethnographic data analysis of two years of Skype text data, comprised more than 187,000 words, used by the research supervisor to foster a writing circle among new researchers in the cohort, Scholar + Writer. In retrospect, the evidence of the agentive and agentic attributes of doctoral researcher agency were considered.

Data Presentation

Data representation within autoethnography varies greatly, and may take the form of literary or visual art, or other creative expressions of findings. In this duoethnography, the authors used a form of autoethnographic vignettes accompanied by the artefacts that prompted the generative insights into the retrospective research question as holistic illustrations of the experience and by which to categorise the agentive and agentic attributes. This was not simply a gratuitous choice, but one that furthered deeper reflection into the emergent attributes characterised within the artefacts as prompted through the reflective generative writing to foster deeper understanding of internal agentive characteristics versus the more external agentic demonstrations of agency. In doing so, the identities of other participants within the writing circle were protected and not necessary to the duoethnographic considerations. Thus, the individual autoethnographic experience was supplemented by the combined duoethnographic experience whereby data representation allowed the cross-consideration of the other's experience, as data representation and reflexive interpretation often occur in simultaneity in auto- or duo-ethnography to illustrate key findings and insights related to the phenomenon of inquiry (Throne, 2019).

Daniel

Dan's progression of agency development was illustrated by the notes, emails and journal entries that he compiled throughout his dissertation journey. These artefacts were analysed and selected to illustrate the evidence of attributes over a ten-month progression of dissertation writing. The *agentive* characteristics of his agency emerged early in the process, particularly in relation to his identity and self-awareness as an educator turned doctoral researcher and insider to the research focus.

Researcher journal, March 2018

During the quiet moments of my busy schedule, I find myself slipping into the stream of thought that I started in the morning, thinking of things to add or tweak. And, when I find the time to go home and write again, I'm already in the zone. This piecemeal approach is not only paying dividends in terms of the amount and quality of stuff I produce at the end of the week, but it is also a great stress release. That being said, I need to deal with this other thing that is causing me anxiety - the sense of isolation and of going
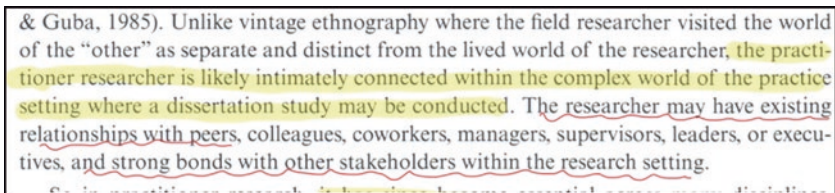
at it alone at a time when I really need writing support. Chapter 2 is really stressing me out. It's funny that I am such a huge proponent of collaborative learning when it comes to teaching writing with my students, but when I need help I find all kinds of excuses not to join the community. I know I can learn from the Skype group [Scholar + Writer]. I have to somehow push harder and try to reap the benefits of their interactions even if it's asynchronous.

The more *agentic* characteristics became evident, especially once Dan's dissertation proposal had been approved by both the committee and the university's institutional review board. During data collection, he faced challenges in the role of insider to the research setting, and he was able to move through barriers successfully to a successful defence of the dissertation research study (Ferreira, 2019) (see Fig. 19.2).

Researcher journal, 18 December 2018

I still had one or two participants left to interview. I remember this now. I remember feeling so relieved but also feeling annoyed that this wasn't required reading. In retrospect, I felt conflicted about the rules of engagement. It just seems to be against the rules of the IRB [institutional review board]. Yet this is something that is written and promoted by my chair at the same university. I wish this university could get its act together and be more transparent about its policy on whether or not it's ok to do backyard research. This should really be required reading long before data collection. I can't but wonder if having read this sooner would have changed the way I proceeded with the interviews with my participants.

Researcher journal, 26 December 2018

& Guba, 1985). Unlike vintage ethnography where the field researcher visited the world of the "other" as separate and distinct from the lived world of the researcher, the practitioner researcher is likely intimately connected within the complex world of the practice setting where a dissertation study may be conducted. The researcher may have existing relationships with peers, colleagues, coworkers, managers, supervisors, leaders, or executives, and strong bonds with other stakeholders within the research setting.

Fig. 19.2   Notability dissertation journal entry "9904A"

I'm struggling with my role as a researcher here of trying not to be "Dan who used to work here". Everything feels terribly compromised. I feel so self-conscious, too. I'm worried that my name might come up in their examples of informal professional development with me. I almost jumped when I heard the other "Daniel's" name. And then, eventually, this participant makes a direct reference to me as "ongoing support". I remember mentally squirming in my chair, almost wincing at the very mention of me. In retrospect, reading this memo, I remember coming up with the idea "of pretending I never worked here", of playing devil's advocate of not assuming I knew anything about their experiences of seeking peer support, sometimes seeking support from me. If I could pretend that that "Dan who used to work here" wasn't me, or was somebody else, then I can focus more on getting to the heart of this quest for getting their story out.

Researcher journal, 6 January 2019

But I am also an insider, too. I mean I'm Dan, the former colleague, yet I am now Dan, the action researcher and also somebody who is working at another institution. I have a fresh perspective now that I work at another school and I feel I can see things that we, at this department, sort of took as tired routine. This outsider perspective is helping me as the questions for my research. But I am really struggling with how I should approach these interviews. Even though I was a former colleague, I don't want to act too familiar or cavalier about the importance of this study. I feel I need to establish some professional distance. But, earlier in my interviews, I felt I was being too distant. Here I feel myself slipping in and out of my roles as "Dan who used to work here", and the action researcher, and the interviewer with more ease. I know I am asking the question of which role I should assume first but I'm not sure this can be consciously achieved. I think it's about embracing all of them but emphasising one over the other as the need arises. I think what I like most about this interview was how I could point back to the aims and tools of this action research study I felt could empower this participant to better articulate and structure their reflection on how they used ICT for instruction.

Dan's strategy to use a doctoral journal helped him to make sense of the messy process of agentic identity formation. Once he embraced the legitimacy of his chosen research site, his transformation from an either/ or agentive role to one of embracing a multiplicity of roles (researcher, insider, outsider and other roles) empowered him to use that knowledge to his research advantage. This practice of documenting the doctoral

research journey, combined with reflection and reflexive opportunities, may be advantageous for remote learning where timely synchronous support may not be readily accessible. Thus, this ability to transform his perception and to elevate his role as researcher within this experience was another demonstration of his agentic ability to rely on the enhanced research agency that he had acquired.

Robin

Robin found her experiences rooted in observations of Dan's, as doctoral candidate, demonstration of doctoral researcher agency through an online writing circle, Scholar + Writer. The experiences in guiding Daniel's doctoral research study were successively unique owing to the self-directedness and demonstration of agency incredibly early in his research process and among their doctoral peers within the facilitated writing circle. She observed Dan's ongoing desire to plan, remain open to guidance and overachieve the typical period to completion, which illustrated the *agentic* characteristics of researcher agency as his posts in the text chat reflected this emergent agency.

Scholar + Writer, August 2018

I'm interviewing teachers so there's this peer nervousness kicking in….In my case, I made the grave error of choosing related to my problem but specific to the grade level I was researching, which was higher education….I had it on a whiteboard right in front of my work station. I would read and reread it like a mantra before starting my day of research.

Dan's demonstration of the *agentive* characteristic of agency was manifested by his desire to share collectively all that he had gained in the process with other researchers at various stages behind his candidature. In turn, this fostered a desire to present milestone encouragement in the aggregate and in visuals of the sequential yet iterative nature of the doctoral research process. Overtly, his agentic attributes of agency were represented by self-directedness, confidence and the self-efficacy necessary to articulate his own process and progress.

Scholar + Writer, December 2018

Dan: Hello, everyone. Just a note of encouragement. I once asked the question how long does it take to collect all your data if you are doing a qualitative study? In hindsight, I realise that it was an impossible question to answer because there are so many variables involved. I started my recruitment around the beginning of October and only last week did I receive all my data necessary to proceed. Throughout that whole process there were many, many sweat-filled sleepless nights wondering if I would get my minimum data…. Well, I did, eventually. In hindsight, I realise that sleeping and eating regularly, and having faith and patience were what got me through. Oh, it helps to have a buddy or two who sympathise with your situation. I hope my story is useful. Hang in there and stay healthy and stay positive. I'm off to Chaps. 4 and 5—finally.

Being guide to this doctoral researcher's journey allowed a retrospective consideration of the research supervisor's agency and how and why it was necessary to continue this consideration. After he graduated, Daniel went on to collaborate with his research supervisor, research faculty, and other graduates and colleagues who shared their feedback in turn for how our research supervisor agency could be enhanced to support new researchers better (Throne et al., 2019). Subsequently, Dan went on to present his dissertation study in his own research poster session, thereby further culminating the anchored agency from these post-doctorate experiences (Ferreira, 2020). Yet it was only through this duoethnography that Dan's more agentive attributes became readily apparent through the sharing of the artefacts that had meaning to his generative writing. It was through these excerpts where he faced and conquered the internal challenges to doctoral research completion that demonstrated these agentive characteristics.

Conclusion

The agentic and agentive characteristics of doctoral research agency warrant further inquiry and analysis into these specific aspects. We call for future research specifically for the agentic and agentive aspects of new doctoral researcher agency, especially from the new investigator's observations of one's own agency development throughout the doctoral journey. Perhaps more research may further illuminate these aspects so they can be incorporated into doctoral pedagogy and among the interactions between new researchers and their supervisors. Similarly, Inouye and McAlpine

(2017) called for continued research to examine the differences in agency as researcher and writer owing to the intertwined complexities of these attributes, and Perez et al. (2019) noted that better understanding may improve inclusion for doctoral students' socially constructed identities.

Specifically for doctoral education research using autoethnography and other forms of self-as-subject research, further support is needed to understand how this method is appropriate for doctoral research and may further enhance agency for the doctoral scholar (Lewis & Throne, 2021). When combined with critical autoethnography, this in-depth exploration during and after the doctoral journey may further harvest insights into the researcher's agency not previously seen or even understood. Post-doctorate, the research supervisor may foster these retrospective explorations of self for doctoral researchers, which may require the research supervisor's awareness of self-agency and the trust needed to foster agentive attributes, in addition to those more agentic characteristics that may be more readily apparent via the research relationship.

DEFINITIONS

Agency: Agency is a belief in one's ability to assume the initiative necessary to accept an active role in one's own research, content, process, engagement and synthesis (Throne, 2019).

Agentic attributes: Agentic characteristics of agency are often aligned with the student's exterior world and may include responsiveness to the impacts of geography, spatiotemporal conditions, material wealth and/or deprivation, and other material factors (Bunn & Lumb, 2019).

Agentive attributes: Agentive characteristics of agency may include self-evaluation, critical engagement with feedback, clarification of research conceptualisation and a desire for iterative feedback from multiple sources (thinking and seeking feedback from various sources). Agentive attributes also rely on affective or emotional responses to the researcher's worldview (Inouye & McAlpine, 2017).

Doctoral learning community: The doctoral learning community is typically a multifaceted community of practice to support doctoral education, and to provide the research supports necessary for quality doctoral research as well as for new investigator agency and development (Throne, 2021).

Education doctorate: The U.S. Doctor of Education programme is typically a practitioner doctoral degree granted at the terminal doctoral

level for those in education (Stewart, 2017). The Doctor of Education was established as a doctoral degree programme at the research setting in 2012.

Researcher positionality: This is a necessary process of a principal investigator for critical self-reflection and explication of self within the individual and social constructs, biases, contexts, layers, power structures, identities, transparency, objectivity and subjectivities for the viewpoint assumed within the research and the aspects of the self that the researcher brings to the inquiry.

Research supervisor agency: This is characterised by efficacy, a strong mentoring ethos, a healthy and diverse communication style, empathy and non-hierarchical relational trust between the research supervisor and the new independent investigator (Throne & Oddi, 2018).

Self-as-subject research: It involves data gathered from a single researcher-participant, rather than data gathered from other participants, within an original empirical inquiry of the lived experience of a construct and/or a phenomenon (Throne, 2019).

Student agency: A doctoral student's agency is the belief in one's ability to take the initiative necessary to assume an active role in one's own learning setting, content, process and engagement (Sweat et al., 2021).

References

Bissett, N., Saunders, S., & Pinto, C. B. (2018). Collaborative autoethnography: Enhancing reflexive communication processes. In T. Vine, J. Clark, S. Richards, & D. Weir (Eds.), *Ethnographic research and analysis* (pp. 253–272). Palgrave Macmillan.

Bunn, M., & Lumb, M. (2019). Education as agency: Challenging educational individualisation through alternative accounts of the agentic. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives, 18*(1), 7–19.

Burrington, D., & Throne, R. (2021). Navigating the doctoral labyrinth: Reflexivity as transformative catalyst for practitioner doctorate persistence and completion. In R. Throne (Ed.), *Practice-based and practice-led research for dissertation development* (pp. 64–86). IGI Global.

de Magalhaes, M. B., Cotterall, S., & Mideros, D. (2019). Identity, voice and agency in two EAL doctoral writing contexts. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 43*, 4–14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2018.05.001

Ferreira, D. I. (2019). *A qualitative action research study of barriers to information and communication technology integration at an Eastern Japan liberal arts college* (Doctoral dissertation, Northcentral University).

Ferreira, D. I. (2020). *Barriers to teacher use of technology for teaching*. Post presented at the 46th annual Japan Association of Language Teaching conference.

Inouye, K. S., & McAlpine, L. (2017). Developing scholarly identity: Variation in agentive responses to supervisor feedback. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice, 14*(2).

Lewis, C. (2020). A critical review of barriers to United States military spouse education and employment. In K. Setzekorn, N. Patnayakuni, & T. Burton (Eds.), *Socioeconomics, diversity, and the politics of online education* (pp. 193–215). IGI Global.

Lewis, C., & Throne, R. (2021). Autoethnography and other self-inquiry methods for practice-based doctoral research. In R. Throne (Ed.), *Practice-based and practice-led research for dissertation development* (pp. 87–107). IGI Global.

Perez, R. J., Harris, L. W., Jr., Robbins, C. K., & Montgomery, C. (2019). Graduate students' agency and resistance after oppressive experiences. *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education, 11*(1), 57–71. https://doi.org/10.1108/SGPE-06-2019-0057

Pyhalto, K., & Keskinen, J. (2012). Doctoral students' sense of relational agency in their scholarly communities. *International Journal of Higher Education, 1*(2), 136–149. https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v1n2p136

Rigler, K. L., Bowlin, L. K., Sweat, K., Watts, S., & Throne, R. (2017). *Agency, socialization, and support: A critical review of doctoral student attrition.* Paper presented at the 3rd international conference on doctoral education, University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED580853

Rigler, K. L., Anastasia, C. M., El-Amin, A., & Throne, R. (2021). Scholarly voice and academic identity: A systematic review of doctoral student agency. In A. Zimmerman (Ed.), *Handbook of research on developing students' scholarly dispositions in higher education* (pp. 63–89). IGI Global.

Shultz, M., Herbst, P., & Schleppegrell, M. (2019). The expression of agency by graduate teaching assistants and professors in relation to their professional obligations. *Linguistics and Education, 52*, 33–43. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2019.05.006

Sobuwa, S., & McKenna, S. (2019). The obstinate notion that higher education is a meritocracy. *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning, 7*(2), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.14426/cristal.v7i2.184

Stewart, T. J. (2017). Educational leaders and the program evaluation dissertation with Logic Model. In V. Storey & K. Hesbol (Eds.), *Contemporary approaches to dissertation development and research methods* (pp. 221–237). IGI Global.

Sweat, K., Yedgarian, V. A., Rigler, K. L., Maddox, S., & Throne, R. (2021). Doctoral practitioner researcher agency and the practice-based research agenda. In *Practice-based and practice-led research for dissertation development* (pp. 188–206). IGI Global.

The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. (2019). *About Carnegie classification*. http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/

Throne, R. (2019). *Autoethnography and heuristic inquiry for doctoral-level researchers: Emerging research and opportunities*. IGI Global.

Throne, R. (2021). Critical autoethnography for social justice research in doctoral education. In V. Wang (Ed.), *Promoting qualitative research methods for critical reflection and change* (pp. 20–37). IGI Global.

Throne, R., & Oddi, B. (2018). *Positionality meets agency: Dissertation supervisor agency, a necessary construct for online research supervision*. Paper presented at the 14th international congress of qualitative inquiry, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, IL. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED594683

Throne, R., & Oddi, B. (2019). Dissertation research supervisor agency for U.S. online doctoral research supervision. In A. Elci, L. L. Beith, & A. Elci (Eds.), *Faculty development for digital teaching and learning*. IGI Global.

Throne, R., Oddi, B., Ferreira, D., & Maddox, S. (2019). *Practice implications of online dissertation research supervisor agency to foster doctoral researcher positionality*. Paper presented at the 3rd annual conference on academic research in education, Las Vegas, NV.

Throne, R., & Walters, K. (2019). *Doctoral research supervisor agency: Fostering engagement in guiding U.S. online practitioner doctorates*. Paper presented at the 15th annual international congress of qualitative inquiry, Urbana-Champaign, IL. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED597658

Doctoral Discourses: The Journey—Past, Present and Beyond

Deborah L. Mulligan and Naomi Ryan

Introduction

This chapter constitutes the conclusion to this edited book. The editors are proud to showcase the stories of those tenacious doctoral students who faced challenges and who strategically overcame them to achieve their ultimate prize: conferral of the highest academic award. The book also narrates the story of the passage of time that has passed as generations of people for hundreds of years have struggled, marched determinably and/or thrived along the doctoral journey between then and now. We look confidently to the future in the understanding that our international knowledge economy has solid and firmly entrenched foundations in the doctoral students of the past and the present.

D. L. Mulligan
School of Education, University of Southern Queensland,
Toowoomba, QLD, Australia

N. Ryan (✉)
UniSQ College, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, QLD, Australia
e-mail: naomi.ryan@usq.edu.au

Globally speaking, a doctorate is the highest academic degree that can be conferred by a university. The act of doctoral study has a rich and complex history, and the story dates back to mediaeval times. These conferrals of "Doctor" were markedly different from the award for which we strive today. We pay homage to the (not so humble) doctorate by including a brief history of the process. As holders of this most prestigious award, it behoves us to acknowledge the past as well as to reflect on the present and to contemplate the future.

All of the contributors to this book, no matter which country of origin, tell a compelling and familiar tale. It may be in reference to their own doctoral practices, or it may be lessons that they have learnt and strategies that they have employed to aid others along the journey. These encapsulate the doctoral experiences of the present. The editors sincerely hope that readers find solace in a shared challenge and strategic remediation if they are encountering roadblocks. For those who have pushed through to completion: congratulations on your accomplishment. We trust that within these pages you will find the necessary strategies to mentor others who are not quite there yet.

Of course, the contributions within the pages of this book do not explore the whole gamut of the doctoral experience. To that end, at the conclusion of this chapter, the authors have included a bibliographical range of contemporary scholarship that we have found useful for doctoral students and supervisors. Each of these sources is categorised with annotations for the scholar.

The Past

The history of the doctoral degree began in the Middle Ages. There is some scholarly contention about its point of origin, with a number of academics citing ninth-century mediaeval Islamic scholarship practices as the foundational source of the doctorate (Al-Attas, 2006; Hall, 2019; Makdisi, 1989), whilst others are of the firm belief that this is not the case (Huff, 2007; Stewart & Meri, 2006).

The common agreement is that European universities have existed since the eleventh century, and the doctoral qualification awarded at that time required mastery of existing bodies of knowledge (Moskaleva, 2014). These applied degrees emphasised reviewing extant information with the requirement of question raising for the purpose of the real-world application of hypotheses (e.g., Doctor of Medicine and Doctor of Law). Upon

conferral, awardees were granted a "licentiate". The term "doctor" is a Latin derivative that means "teacher" or "instructor"; thus a *licentia docendi* was originally awarded to those scholars who were licensed to teach at a university (Makdisi, 1981, p. 272).

History is uncertain as to the exact timing of the original conferral of the European applied doctorate; however, Noble (1994) posited that it was first awarded by the University of Paris in the year 1150. From the Renaissance (the fifteenth century) to the Enlightenment (the eighteenth century) eras, the majority of European academics were attached to universities that were heavily influenced by the Catholic Church. In order to generate an income, scholars taught the offspring of the wealthy nobility.

It is thought that the Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) made its first appearance in Germany in the seventeenth century at the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin. This degree consisted of coursework, followed by a dissertation (Hall, 2019). The first teaching and research university appeared in Germany in 1810 (Moskaleva, 2014). Gradually, this university attracted foreign students (mostly from the United States) with a view to obtaining the PhD (Rosenberg, 1962). At this time, the term "philosophy" meant a "love of wisdom" (Moskaleva, 2014).

It was not until higher education became more accessible post-World War Two that doctoral study became more prevalent. However, it is still considered a challenging and laborious process and, as such, is not to be undertaken lightly. In 2018, just 1.1% of eligible adults in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries held doctoral degrees (Hutt, 2019). Not all of these recipients work in university environments. The conferral of a doctorate opens career doors in a wide variety of professions, and awardees make an invaluable contribution to the international knowledge economy.

THE PRESENT

All of the authors who contributed to this book have lived experience as practitioners of doctoral work. Some are current doctoral candidates, and some are continuing to establish themselves as post-doctoral researchers within academia. Each of them has a story to tell and a sincere wish to share their successful strategies in the hope that it will help others.

Deborah L. Mulligan, Naomi Ryan and Patrick Alan Danaher reviewed the position of doctoral students in terms of their doctoral studies in Chap. 1. They acknowledged the contrived power imbalance between the

student and other, supposedly more powerful stakeholders, and asked the reader to consider other discourses that position the student for success.

Section 1 of this book—Introduction to the Doctorate—discussed the initial phase of the doctoral process. It focused on those elements of doctoral study with which newly confirmed candidates can struggle.

In Chap. 2, Geoff Danaher, Mike Danaher and Patrick Alan Danaher interrogated the concept of an original and significant contribution to knowledge. They examined the meaning behind the concept and its impact on all doctoral stakeholders, including the students, the supervisors and the thesis examiners. The authors highlighted the dynamic, differentiated and heterogeneous character of knowledge contributions at doctoral level, which consequently disrupted taken-for-granted assumptions that such contributions are unchanging, uniform and homogeneous. Suzanne Meibusch tackled the slippery and contested notion of authenticity in Chap. 3. She recounted her battle to gain ethics approval for a study that challenged both routine doctoral lexicon and accepted ethical perspectives. In a powerful reconstruction of her lived experience, the author revealed through journal entries the personal experiences and vulnerabilities of her passage through this stage of her degree, and if and how she could move forwards with her research.

Section 2 of the book—The Body of the Doctorate—focused on Phase 2 of the doctoral process, which begins post-ethics approval.

The first subsection—Forming and Sustaining Relationships—highlighted the need for the establishment of meaningful and supportive relationships whilst enacting doctoral research. Chapter 4, by Jenni L. Harding, Boni Hamilton and Stacy Loyd, reviewed the significance of the student/advisor (supervisor) relationship. In Chap. 5, Gina Lynne Peyton, David Brian Ross, Vanaja Nethi, Melissa Tara Sasso and Lucas A. DeWitt focused on non-traditional doctoral students and the challenging lived experiences of studying a higher degree when older. Gendered challenges were discussed in Chap. 6, by Carolin Müller, specifically women's experiences of doctoral programmes.

The second subsection—Operationalising the Study—demonstrated the manner in which students employed best practice when going about their research. Chapter 7, by Camille Thomas, presented her thoughts about fieldwork preparation. In Chap. 8, Bronte van der Hoorn and Jon Whitty provoked the reader to ponder on the philosophy of thinking-about-your-thinking and re-examining doctoral perceptions.

The third subsection—Writing the Thesis—focused on examining tensions to do with university expectations. In Chap. 9, Belinda Cash reviewed the advent of the thesis by publication, citing this mode of thesis production as an additional pressure on doctoral candidates. Chapter 10, by Anup Shrestha, presented a different perspective and deconstructed the thesis by publication, which the author maintains is an "agile" method of doctoral completion. In Chap. 11, Natalia Kovalyova explored the mythology around dissertation writing and provided practical advice about such writing. Chapter 12, by Dawne Fahey, Esther Fitzpatrick and Alys Mendus, provoked the reader to deconstruct and disrupt dominant doctoral discourses, and, in so doing, to engage with certain experiences that are seldom addressed. Deborah L. Mulligan used Chap. 13 to recount her strategy of successfully challenging loneliness during the write-up phase of her doctorate through participation in an online community writing group.

The fourth subsection—Developing and Articulating Doctoral Identities—addressed the issue of establishing doctoral identities. In Chap. 14, Paola R. S. Eiras and Henk Huijser discussed the aims of the doctorate and the developmental outcome of "a critical intellectual". Chapter 15, by Gina Curró, addressed the issue of student connection as a crucial factor in developing a doctoral identity. Jeannette Hannaford used the metaphor of slow trills in Chap. 16 to ask the reader to consider the aspect of doctoral contribution. Chapter 17, by B. Vinod Kumar, interrogated his lived experience of the doctoral journey and advocated the mental and physical benefits of yoga practice for the doctoral student.

Section 3 of the book—Concluding the Doctorate—examined three important aspects of the doctorate as students come to the end of their doctoral journeys. In Chap. 18, Fiona Charlton and Peter Smith looked at the students' experiences of the viva, the oral examination required by some universities. Daniel Ferreira and Robin Throne used the final chapter in this section, Chap. 19, to interrogate the impact of researcher positionality upon doctoral completion. They explored a duoethnography of experiences of a doctoral supervisor and two Doctor of Education alumni.

The Future

It is now timely to look to the future, and to support the doctoral awardees of tomorrow to strategise their research processes. The authors have compiled an annotated list of extant resources that may assist doctoral students on their journeys to the successful attainment of the highest

degree that can be awarded by a university. This list is categorised into the following sections: formal printed publications such as books and journal articles; informal social media such as blogs, vlogs, Twitter and Facebook sites; university resources; and networking opportunities that the student may be able to access.

An annotated list of resources is a useful tool for sharing knowledge. "Not only does annotation inform peer review process, [but also] the practice amplifies the social qualities of research dissemination and scholarly communication" (Kalir & Garcia, 2021, n.p.). The list that the authors have included in this chapter is by no means exhaustive, and is meant to provide a snapshot of available resources. Each item has been utilised by doctoral scholars globally, and has been included for its academic accessibility.

Finally, the authors offer doctoral students a brief primer on considerations to deliberate upon when selecting a conference/seminar/symposium/workshop in which to showcase their work, or simply to attend for the purpose of gleaning knowledge in their chosen fields.

Printed Publications

- Belcher, W. B. (2019). *Writing your journal article in twelve weeks: A guide to academic publishing success* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press. Belcher's text is handy in that it utilises a revolutionary approach that enables authors to overcome anxiety and to produce papers/publications in a timely and efficient manner, leading to success in their chosen disciplines. The book, based on knowledge that has been developed over a decade through teaching scholarly writers, is thoughtfully set out in weekly sections to guide the reader through the particular steps and features that will assist them to develop a strong article and to revise accordingly. It covers some of the challenges that have been highlighted by chapter authors in this book so far, such as becoming motivated, constructing arguments and developing a logical paper. At the end of the 12 weeks, it is intended that the writer will have a fully constructed article that is ready to be sent to a journal. Further information on this text can be found at: https://wendybelcher.com/writing-advice/writing-your-journal-article-in-twelve/
- O'Leary, Z. (2021). *The essential guide to doing your research project* (4th ed.). Sage Publications. O'Leary's book is a handy primer for

those who are just beginning their research journey and are feeling overwhelmed by the massive amounts of new and confusing terminology utilised in thesis writing. This publication guides the novice researcher throughout the process. It can be your best friend. The fact that it is now on its fourth edition is a testament to the usefulness of this book.

- Peel, K. L. (2020). A beginner's guide to applied educational research using thematic analysis. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation,* *25*(2). https://scholarworks.umass.edu/pare/vol25/iss1/2/

This paper is a useful beginner's guide for qualitative researchers who are looking to use thematic analysis to analyse data. Peel provides an outline of a case study approach to research design with a focus on educational settings. The primer set out by the author is cross disciplinary and is definitely recommended for beginner researchers.

Social Media/Online Resources

Websites

- Doctoral Writing SIG (Special Interest Group) is a website that invites research supervisors, researchers and research students to a space where knowledge concerning the doctoral writing process can be shared. This information may include ideas, resources and aspirations to build learnings about the skills required for successful higher degree by research writing. Formed in 2012, this SIG is a place where lively discussion takes place through a blog. The topics may include information about grant and research opportunities, policy and practice, and conferences. Topical discussions are provided such as how to adapt through a pandemic and offer virtual supervision to doctoral students. It is also a safe place where users can ask questions and source answers. The blog offers an array of teaching resources and links to other useful sites in the social media space. The instructions to join the group are provided on the webpage. There is also a version of the group on Twitter (details supplied further on in the Twitter resources). https://doctoralwriting.wordpress.com/about/
- Methodspace is provided by Sage Publishing, and the site has a wealth of information for academics. This particular page of tips for

mentoring students focuses on the relationships and guidance required to mentor students who are working professionals. The tips focus on the types of situations that may arise for non-traditional doctoral students and how to support them. For example, you may need to provide more time with these students to build rapport, develop a strong relationship and spend more time understanding the life stages that the student is going through in order to offer guidance and support that are useful. It may also mean having a good understanding of current writing resources for those students where it has been a long time since they have undertaken academic writing. https://www.methodspace.com/tips-for-faculty-who-mentor-students-who-are-working-professionals/

Blogs
- Patter—an informative blog created by Professor Pat Thomson, who provides advice to address the sometimes hidden aspects of academic writing and research that are often challenging for beginner researchers. This blog focuses on "research education, academic writing, public engagement, funding, [and] other eccentricities" (Thomson, n.d.). It is updated weekly, and there is provision for comments and questions, which are responded to in a timely manner. Topics are widely ranging, and may focus on particular elements of research writing such as the abstract, conceptual frameworks or how to conclude a paper. Other blog posts may address the imposter syndrome, making your case stronger or making a poster. Professor Thomson also has a version on Twitter (details supplied further on in the Twitter resources). https://patthomson.net/
- Research Whisperer—developed by Dr Tseen Khoo and Dr Jonathan O'Donnell, this blog is where you can find relevant information for researchers that is cleverly crafted and aimed at helping them to develop their research careers. This blog site offers scholars the opportunity to be part of an international community of scholars and research professionals. There are regular blog posts and interactions that are useful to all doctoral students, written in a conversational style that is easy to comprehend. The main categories of posts are around finding funding (e.g., Fantastic funding and where to find it), research culture (e.g., Tricky topics and managing your social

media presence) and building academic track records (e.g., Treating networking like a research project). https://researchwhisperer.org

- Thesis Whisperer—managed by Professor Inger Mewburn, director of Researcher Development at the Australian National University. This blog has a range of interesting and informative articles aimed at early career through to mid-career researchers. A blog topic is posted monthly, and subjects range from pre-commencement of the doctorate through to the effective management of resource projects. Categories of blogs include headings such as Productivity (e.g., A visit from the procrastination fairy), General writing advice (e.g., 5 ways to declutter your writing), Advice on the dissertation (e.g., Theory anxiety), Dealing with academics (e.g., Unhelpful PhD advice), Presenting and publishing (e.g., How to sell your thesis in three minutes), Employability (e.g., What do academic employers want?) and Working with your supervisor (e.g., How to tell your supervisor you want a divorce). https://thesiswhisperer.com/

Facebook Sites

- PhD and Early Career Researcher Parents—PhD and ECR Parents Group is open to those who are current postgraduate students (PhD, EdD, JD etc.) and who are pregnant or parenting through this process, and those at the early stages of their research career. https://www.facebook.com/groups/776957585681408

- PhD OWLs—Older Wiser Learners was established for people who start or re-enter studying in their 40s, 50s, 60s or older. This is a private Facebook group with over 3000 members globally. The Facebook page also offers a messenger function called OWLs Writing where students can communicate directly with others during periods of writing or attending to other scholarly needs. As Deborah L. Mulligan discussed in Chap. 13 in this book, the doctoral journey is lonely, but you do not have to be alone. Finding a writing tribe such as OWLs is a way to mitigate feelings of social isolation during the long hours of writing. https://www.facebook.com/groups/708019069302386

- Women in Academia Support Network Group #wiasn—a professional network for academics who identify as women. This is a closed Facebook site to which you must send a request in order to join the group. It offers a variety of posts from female academics regarding ideas, support, issues with working in academia, questions posed to

the group and so forth. This type of social media networking aligns with Carolin Müller's ideas in Chap. 6 in this book, whereby the formation of alliances by female doctoral students through contemporary spaces can assist women to overcome disadvantages in academia and have their needs accommodated. https://www.facebook.com/groups/905644729576673

- Light relief—the following selected Facebook, Instagram and Twitter popular sites can be followed or joined freely; they are not closed groups. They are designed to provide humour in relation to the serious topics to which doctoral students and academics are exposed regularly. A relatable set of memes, videos, graphics, pictures and so on make light of such situations and create a space for humour in what, at times, can seem like a never ending marathon.

I Should Be Writing (https://www.facebook.com/groups/ishouldbewriting)

Lovephdmemes (https://www.instagram.com/lovephdmemes/?hl=en)

PHDComics @PHDcomics (https://twitter.com/phdcomics?lang=en)

Reviewer 2 Must Be Stopped! (https://www.facebook.com/groups/reviewer2)

Writing & Editing @WrtrStat (https://twitter.com/wrtrstat?lang=en)

Podcasts
- Inger Mewburn and Jason Downs—On the Reg, Thesiswhisperer

A series of podcasts is offered for the listener where Inger and Jason discuss work/research and provide practical tips on how to balance life. These are in the context of academia and are relevant to both doctoral students and academic staff members. These podcasts can be accessed at https://onthereg.buzzsprout.com/

Twitter
- Doctoralwriting @DocwritingSIG (https://twitter.com/docwritingsig?lang=en)
- L. Maren Wood, PhD @drmarenw (https://twitter.com/drmarenw?lang=en)
- PhD Forum @PhDForum (https://twitter.com/phdforum?lang=en)

- Prof Inger Mewburn @thesiswhisperer (https://twitter.com/thesiswhisperer?lang=en)
- Prof Pat Thomson @ThomsonPat (https://twitter.com/ThomsonPat)
- Research Whisperer @researchwhisperer (https://twitter.com/researchwhisper?lang=en)
- Writing for Research @Write4Research (https://twitter.com/write4research?lang=en)

Vlogs

- Tara Brabazon—Professor of Cultural Studies at Flinders University, Australia, provides insights on a range of topics for research students. Some of these topics include preparation for the doctoral programme, how to write proposals, vulnerability, overcoming negative feedback and so forth. These 20–40 minute videos are informative and entertaining. Some of these vlogs are developed in response to student questions, so they are very accurate in terms of addressing doctoral student concerns. Tara's vlogs are freely available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/user/TaraBrabazon

University Resources

Support Groups

Find out if there is an active postgraduate student group within your university—either online or face-to-face. These are generally places where doctoral students can meet to discuss various aspects of their doctoral journeys. An established postgraduate and early career researcher group has regular meeting times that you can slot into your routine. Participating in a group such as this has both personal and professional advantages.

It can be tempting to stay at your computer and not mix with others, but these groups can be an effective aid in helping you through the doctoral process. The diversity of student experiences is highlighted in these networking opportunities, and often you will find at least one kindred spirit. Additionally, these groups can provide you with a place to vent about perceived institutional inequities, to share your successes and challenges with those who have a very good idea about what you are going through and simply to belong. Doctoral journeys can be arduous, so it is beneficial to mix with peers to share your lived experience.

Some postgraduate and early career researcher groups provide collaborative opportunities for joint authorship publication. This may be in the form of journal articles or book chapters. Further, you may find that your university group conducts symposia. This is an excellent opportunity for you to share your research ideas in a safe and supportive environment with an appreciative academic audience. Symposia also afford networking occasions in the form of other interdisciplinary joint projects. Shared knowledge about future conferences and other academic events is also a by-product of availing yourself of the opportunity to leave your study area and mix with others.

Networking

There are a number of very good reasons why doctoral candidates and early/late career researchers should network. Sander (2018) posited that the formation of a robust professional network is one of the elements that constitutes a successful career. Networking provides access to a range of resources, knowledge and assistance. Sander further claimed: "Strong networks provide a range of benefits[,] including learning, sources of information, salary growth, innovation and a means of getting things done" (n.p.). Both ideas and relationships are positively generated when professional networking is effective.

The best way to network is attending (physically or online) a variety of academic gatherings such as conferences, symposia, seminars and workshops. Participating in these professional gatherings can benefit both the novice and the experienced researcher. Interacting with people with a common interest or with academic peers can reinforce, create and expand your knowledge base. It can also aid in establishing a wider academic peer group. This can generate problem-solving discussions. These types of gatherings also provide opportunities to meet specialists in your field and/or people whom you consider to be the leaders of thought in your area. This personalised interaction allows a more comprehensive understanding of ideas, and allows you to delve more deeply into concepts that you may have read about in books or journal articles. Presenters are often open to discussion and consultation with novice researchers.

Conferences/symposia/seminars/workshops also provide exposure for your own work. By presenting your ideas in a public forum, you allow others to broaden your knowledge base with their ideas and suggestions. This feedback can be invaluable for your conceptualisations. Academic

conversation can not only help you to widen your knowledge base but also allow others to meet you on an informal basis. This, of course, may be an entrée into an unforeseen collaboration or mentorship. Incidental and unplanned meetings with other scholars can lead to unexpected benefits that expand your research world, particularly if you present to an audience of interested peers. It is also worthwhile to attend academic gatherings to widen your academic scope and broaden your academic learnings, even when the topic is not something in which you may initially be interested.

Finally, conferences and others provide an avenue whereby you are able to network in order to advance your career, discover potential supervisors or thesis examiners, add to your professional development or just simply enjoy mixing with other people who love learning as much as you do.

How to Decide Which Conference Is Right for You

How do you decide which conference/symposia/seminar/workshop will be most advantageous for your professional and/or personal needs? Christoff (2018) suggested five elements when considering attendance at a conference. These are goals, budget, audience/presenters, schedule and other obligations.

1. Consider your goal for attending a particular conference. What is it that you want to get out of it? What outcome are you seeking through participation? You may be seeking visibility for your research, networking opportunities or simply to have a good time with like-minded peers—or perhaps you wish to experience all three!
2. Is the conference too expensive? If your desire is to attend only one workshop to listen to one speaker whom you may admire, is it worth the money for the registration? Perhaps you would be better served watching an Internet clip if one is available.
3. Who else is attending? Are you hoping to network? Are the presenters pertinent to your interest area? Do your homework on this. A disappointing conference is a waste of valuable funds and time.
4. Is the conference schedule workable for you? Are the workshops in which you are interested accessible? Or are they all on at the same concurrent time? Is there time set aside for you to interact personally with the presenters? Often speakers are very happy to talk to you about your work.

5. Finally, what are your other obligations at the time of the conference? Would your time be better suited elsewhere? Consider your deadlines. If you have some writing that has to be completed at the time of the conference, factor in your timeline needs.

If the conference is face-to-face, you may like to consider the money that you will spend on registration, travel and other associated costs such as accommodation, food, etc.

However, if the conference is online, you might like to consider these additional aspects:

- Time differences—whether you are willing to join a meeting very late at night/early in the morning.
- Internet connection—unstable internet can ruin a conference that you have paid money to attend or, even worse, to make a presentation.
- Environment—do you have a quiet space in which to concentrate?
- Will there be breakout rooms for more discussion? Will you get an opportunity to meet the speakers?
- Are the keynote presentations recorded?
- Is there easy access to the various "rooms" of the conference if you wish to swap streams for different speakers?

Enago Academy (2020) warned researchers to beware predatory conferences. These are conferences that appear legitimate but, upon closer inspection (suspect email, website, peer reviews, etc.), the credibility is suspect. The author encouraged a three-step system where the researcher was advised to consider certain aspects:

1. "Think" (n.p.) about whether your research is well-served at that particular conference.
2. "Check" (n.p.) the legitimacy of the conference (this may include the history of the conference and the organisation behind it, ease of access to conference details and the popularity/research pedigree of the keynote speakers).
3. "Attend" (n.p.) if you have determined that the two prior actions have fulfilled your needs.

This blog post also recommends that researchers thoroughly read the guidelines for submission (https://www.enago.com/academy/a-researchers-guide-to-making-the-most-of-academic-conferences/).

Pat Thomson (2017) recommended that novice researchers should attend one or two conferences prior to submitting an abstract for a formal presentation. She suggested that novices "go to a conference where you can get the lie of the land" (n.p.). In this way, you learn conference protocols, which paves the way to ease and comfort in future conferences when you may be nervous already if you are delivering a paper.

Thomson (2017) suggested looking at special interest conferences where you are able to network with researchers in your specific disciplinary area. She noted that novice researchers will be privy to the most up to date information in this environment. Thomson also recommended these types of conferences as an avenue for investigating publication opportunities in journals most suited to your work. You may also be able to book a time to speak with a journal editor. Another suggestion is to attend conferences where "publishers are well represented" (n.p.) towards the end of your doctorate. Finally, she warned that not all conferences will be meaningful personally and/or beneficial professionally.

Abstracts

Of course, an abstract must be submitted prior to the conference presentation. Lantsoght (2017) advised not to wait too long before submitting your abstract to a conference. Spaces for presentation opportunities at popular conferences can be competitive. Organisers will carefully examine abstract submissions to determine their value for the conference. To this end, here is a suggested checklist for writing an abstract:

- Check the submission date; some organisers have the flexibility to consider late abstracts, but many do not.
- Pay attention to the requirements of the referencing and spelling styles.
- Ensure that you do not exceed the word limit.
- Adhere to the layout with regard to line spacing and font style/size.
- Include a keyword from the conference theme in your title and refer to it within the text of your abstract.
- Align your abstract to your paper; do not include information in your abstract that will not appear in your presentation.
- Ensure that your particulars are included in your document: name, institution and so forth.

Poster Presentations

If you do not want, or you are not ready, to present in front of an audience, try a poster presentation. This can be an effective introduction to the world of academic gatherings and be less stressful than presenting in front of an audience. As long as your poster is engaging and you make an effort to speak to those delegates who come to view it, the experience can be beneficial.

Basic rules should be followed such as:

- Ensure your poster follows the guidelines set out by the conference organisers regarding size.
- Make your poster interesting so that it draws the eyes of the delegates.
- Review your poster so that it is succinct and not cluttered.
- Practise your initial spiel if someone asks you generally about your research; don't be afraid to point to relevant words/phrases on your poster as you speak.

Check out these resources for techniques to help you to make your poster stand out from the rest:

Erren, T. C., & Bourne, P. E. (2007). Ten simple rules for a good poster presentation. *PLoS Computational Biology*, *3*(5), e102. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.0030102
https://guides.nyu.edu/posters
https://www.stemcell.com/efficient-research/scientific-poster-presentations

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the historical significance of the doctorate, followed by a brief summary of the contributors' doctoral stories in the present time. Finally, the authors have provided an annotated list of resources for future doctoral students, supervisors and researchers. We hope that this list is useful to all stakeholders as a set of reference tools for the various stages of doctoral writing and research.

To the doctoral students of tomorrow, the authors would like to wish you well on your fascinating journey. As we have read in the intervening chapters, the doctoral journey can be a challenging one that tests

resiliency, commitment and self-belief. There will be times when your frustration level is maximised but, paradoxically, there will also be times of pure elation. Keep going, roll with the emotions, and let them inspire you and push you forward.

References

Al-Attas, S. F. (2006). From Jāmi' ah to university: Multiculturalism and Christian–Muslim dialogue. *Current Sociology, 54*(1), 112–132. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392106058837

Belcher, W. B. (2019). *Writing your journal article in twelve weeks: A guide to academic publishing success* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Christoff, C. (2018). How to decide which conferences to attend (5 pro tips). https://www.business2community.com/strategy/how-to-decide-which-conferences-to-attend-5-pro-tips-02141497

Enago Academy. (2020, October 27). A researcher's guide to making the most of academic conferences. https://www.enago.com/academy/a-researchers-guide-to-making-the-most-of-academic-conferences/

Erren, T. C., & Bourne, P. E. (2007). Ten simple rules for a good poster presentation. *PLoS Computational Biology, 3*(5), e102. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.0030102

Hall, S. (2019, May 10). The history of the doctoral degree. https://www.the-classroom.com/history-phd-degree-5257288.html

Huff, T. E. (2007). *The rise of early modern science: Islam, China, and the West* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Hutt, R. (2019, October 15). These countries have the most doctoral graduates. *World Economic Forum.* https://europeansting.com/2019/10/15/these-countries-have-the-most-doctoral-graduates/

Kalir, R., & Garcia, A. (2021, May 28). Joining the "great conversation"—The fundamental role of annotation in academic society. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2021/05/28/joining-the-great-conversation-the-fundamental-role-of-annotation-in-academic-society/

Lantsoght, E. (2017, November 2). How to select which conference to attend. https://www.academictransfer.com/en/blog/how-to-select-which-conference-to-attend/

Makdisi, G. (1981). *The rise of colleges: Institutions of learning in Islam and the West.* Edinburgh University Press.

Makdisi, G. (1989, April–June). Scholasticism and humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West. *Journal of the American Oriental Society, 109*(2), 175–182. https://doi.org/10.2307/604423

Moskaleva, A. (2014, June 23). A brief history of the PhD. http://www.neuwrite-west.org/blog/2014/6/23/a-brief-history-of-the-phd

Noble, K. A. (1994). *Changing doctoral degrees: An international perspective (Society for Research into Higher Education)*. Open University Press.

O'Leary, Z. (2021). *The essential guide to doing your research project* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Peel, K. L. (2020). A beginner's guide to applied educational research using thematic analysis. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation, 25*(2), 1–15. https://scholarworks.umass.edu/pare/vol25/iss1/2/

Rosenberg, R. P. (1962). Eugene Schuyler's Doctor of Philosophy degree: A theory concerning the dissertation. *The Journal of Higher Education, 33*(7), 381–386. https://doi.org/10.2307/1979947

Sander, L. (2018, May 29). Research shows networking is painful, but it can be a lot better. *The Conversation*. https://theconversation.com/research-shows-networking-is-painful-but-it-can-be-a-lot-better-96854

Stewart, D. J., & Meri, J. W. (2006). Degrees, or Ijazah. In J. W. Meri (Ed.), *Medieval Islamic civilization: An encyclopedia* (Vol. 1, pp. 201–203). Routledge.

Thomson, P. (2017, September 4). Choosing a conference. *Patter*. https://pat-thomson.net/2017/09/04/choosing-a-conference/

Thomson, P. (n.d.). *Patter*. https://patthomson.net/

INDEX[1]

---

[1] Note: Page numbers followed by 'n' refer to notes.