Getting up close and textual: An interpretive study of feedback practice and social relations in doctoral supervision

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work that has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.
Dedication

This thesis is for my son Sam (mon bien aimé p’tit/grand prince), my neglected partner Ross, my dear dad and Kerry, brothers David and Roger, my nieces Jess, Rache, Carlia, and sisterly-in-law Fleur, as well as my extended family, my dear friend Jo Hart, and especially for my mum.
Abstract

The privatised interactions between doctoral student and supervisor as they jointly work on the text are the subject of my thesis. To investigate this important yet neglected aspect of supervision, I use data obtained from interviews with seven doctoral supervisory pairs in the social sciences, arts, and humanities in an Australian university. My methodology comprises a series of close-ups to explore feedback relations within supervision and the ways in which meanings are played out for both supervisors and students. The interpretive approach draws upon Foucaultian theory, critical discourse analysis, and (post)critical theory traditions. Accordingly, the power asymmetries between supervisor and student are seen as productive - in the sense of creatively fertile - and not merely synonymous with prohibition or disempowerment. Within five interpretive chapters, I engage with the productive and problematic aspects of supervisory relations, making visible how supervisory feedback assists in the formation of students’ scholarly identities. My analysis examines how the pressures to ensure the production of timely and disciplined thesis texts are impacting on feedback relations. It also examines various ambiguities and tensions such as those embedded in the supervisor’s position as ‘pastor’ and ‘critic’, between asymmetrical and relational power, between the promotion of authorship/autonomy on the one hand, and the preservation of the canon on the other. My discussion highlights the ways supervisors, notwithstanding their authority, attempt to mediate the power disparity through mechanisms such as standing back, withholding and filtering feedback, or using the invitational strategies of ‘under offering’ which downplay the disciplinary nature of their work. I also reflect on what makes acceptance or resistance more or less likely and what promotes/hinders the transition to and reliance on students’ own expertise. Overall, the interpretations I offer suggest that the exercise of power is never straightforward, is opaque and ambiguous and susceptible to misunderstanding and unpredictability. My research thus reveals a picture of social relations that is less orderly and transparent than assumed in the institutional literature and associated guidelines. In particular, the research
qualifies the current institutional faith that PhD research/writing is a transparent process, within which supervisors can be trained in the ‘skills’ for providing effective feedback so students can work at an efficient pace and produce predictable results.
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Introduction

... a writer must stand on the rock of herself and her judgement or be swept away by the tide or sink in the quaking earth: there must be an inviolate place where the choices and decisions, however imperfect, are the writer's own, where the decisions must be as individual and solitary as birth and death.


Academic writing is writing that never leaves school, that never grows beyond the judging, persecuting eye of the parent to enter into a dialogue with the society and culture of its time, as an adult amongst other adults, with all the acceptance of mutual imperfection which this implies. Always seeking approval of a higher authority, the academic writer endlessly defers responsibility. ... Never is the academic in that inviolate place described by Janet Frame where the choices and decisions, however imperfect, must be the writer's own, as individual and solitary as life and death.

(Brett, 1991: 521-522)
Anchoring the lines of enquiry

This thesis expands on the unsteady process by which feedback is transacted to authorise graduate students’ writing and academic subjectivities. It thus draws inferences about the process of writing a thesis – a process which I as writer am also undergoing.

Becoming an authoritative knower is at times painful and tension-ridden with its attendant features of regulation, sanctioning, reward and punishment. Little is known about how the process of becoming authorised is experienced by graduate students through their research/writing practices. This work is not done alone as supervisors also direct their efforts to this formation. However, there has been a similar lack of attention paid to a supervisor’s pedagogical strategies offered in the form of feedback as this process of (re)producing an “intelligible academic identity” (Johnson, Lee, & Green, 2000: 136) is unfolding.

Between the desired behaviours of a writer and the actual behaviours academic writing produces lies a discrepancy (Brett, 1991). More precisely, a gap/fissure exists between the ways a writer must authorise his or her own position while being subject to academic rules and conventions to gain access to discursive authority. In her essay on the bureaucratisation of writing, Brett’s critique of the institutional effects on writing highlights the rigidity of academic life. Brett (1991) contends that because academic writers are behoven to abide by conventions, strict canonical regulation, and disciplinary rules and codes, they are subject to perpetual authorisation. The implications of this unconcluded process of self-responsibility are that the academic project is stunted. It is precisely the application of the pedagogic techniques which channel graduate students towards particular patterns of knowledge production, concepts of authority, and academic identities which fuel my interest in supervision. Hence, I will explore the interlocking of the three core threads: pedagogy, pastoral care, and the production of disciplinary knowledges to discern how they are implicated in the process of authorisation.
of scholars where there is a triadic supervisor-student-text relation (Grant, 2003).

My thesis brings together an analysis of pedagogy and feedback relations in supervision. I will examine how these practices are reconciled to allow the (re)production of disciplinary knowledges. The articulation of pedagogy, pastoral care and disciplinary knowledges will allow for a focus on the operations of power in each of these spheres of influence to highlight students’ difficulties in accommodating and resisting the professional discourse of expert knowledge. This will necessitate examining the constitutive powers of a supervisor’s feedback to identify the productive and problematic effects of this expert knowledge.

Moreover, this endeavour will involve teasing out how students are formed as particular kinds of scholars, given their positions as pedagogic, literate and disciplinary subjects. As part of this endeavour, I wish to explore students’ resistance to their supervisors’ feedback to examine the extent to which students are constituted by their expert supervisors’ knowledge. This will mean examining the difficulty of resisting the professional discourse of personal autonomy which is intrinsic to the production of a licensed scholar. I will also focus on the productive dimensions of power relations to direct attention to how these textual transactions mediate students’ becoming as they learn to create appropriate disciplinary personae. Furthermore, I will capture the ways students develop the confidence to express their ‘own’ ideas while they are being formed and shaped through writing, response, and revision.

When a supervisor (or another person) contributes their thinking to a student’s writing through offering feedback to improve the work, the act of owning a position and its arguments may be deferred. For to argue and to ‘own’ a position is to acknowledge the relation between a network of selves and others, and to come to terms (or maybe not) with the need for professional judgement of the content (the value of dependency). It means being able to swim with or against other voices and come to accept the limits
of one’s own aptitudes. If this process unfolds punitively with too much attention placed on correction for the sake of improvement to satisfy the expectations of the credential, then the outcome may be de-authorisation, empty writing, and sapped individuals with a dampened desire “to engage an audience outside their discipline” which, Brett suggests, “corrodes the importance of what they have to say” (1991: 514).

In supervision, the process of authorisation is notoriously uneven and unstable. The “games of truth” (Foucault, 1987: 1) played require us to conceal the exigencies of the transformation to scholar - the difficulties, incompleteness, clumsiness, exclusions, emotional discord, dilemmas, etc. Because a polished thesis text maintains an illusion of effortlessness when it is presented, the trials and tribulations of the process are lost. There are few signs of the process of authorisation of the writer in the text. It is left to the reader to read between the lines, even speculate from reading the acknowledgements section, perhaps as you have inferred from reading the lengthy list in the front matter of this thesis. Just what was the path this scholar took to being authorised? Few thesis writers divulge the wrong turns they have made, the incessant labour of making conflictual choices, and the doubts they have about their work to give the impression of seamlessness in the text. I believe that it would make interesting reading and give insights about the construction of the thesis writer’s text if these were shared, as I will do in mine, rather than obscuring the nature of the journey.

Unlike Brett, I believe that academic writing is beginning to embrace plurality and it is possible to find a space for uncertainty and disorientation, while being reliant on a higher authority. My own position is that the process of reconciliation between the pedagogies of writing and feedback and the production of disciplinary knowledges can occur and decisions involving individual judgement can be “individual and solitary” while also being shared and consultative. I believe that writing can be taught in such ways that

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1 Interdisciplinarity is one of the graduate attributes for Murdoch students.
2 I think of all the PhD students I know who are pushing the boundaries in their work, especially those doing creative doctorates, and the many academics who write to disrupt phallogocentric modes of writing.
personal control is enhanced without subscribing to the culture of negative individualism. This particular cultural script of negative individualism belongs to a discourse which attributes success or failure to individual students, where students are inclined to attribute their lack of success to their individual failings and exonerate the university from its institutional responsibility. But this refusal to be “swept away” by the authorising gaze of expert knowers or to “sink in the mire” of theoretical and methodological fashions/orthodoxies is to stand firm despite the instability inherent to the process of becoming.

But first I need to backtrack a little to provide some idea of how I came to ‘own’ this position.

The cultivation of scholarly knowledge and the pedagogical practices devised to facilitate this production has been my work in universities over the last 20 years. In this arena of practice, I have assisted with the preparation of expert knowers, by working with hundreds of doctoral students in administrative positions (three years) after graduating, and in teaching roles (16 years). During this time, I have ‘processed’ and edited hundreds of student theses. Having had the privilege to work closely with graduate students, I have gained insights into the cultural politics of thesis writing in ‘western’ universities.

Hence, my reasons for doing this research are both personal and professional. They are motivated by the possibility for change and in reaction to many of the changes which universities have introduced as they have caved in to government pressure to become more like businesses. I see supervisors struggling to do their work under immense pressure and students being hustled along and reduced to a ‘timely completion’. All these changes have reinforced my views regarding the complexities of supervision and candidature. Some of these views also reflect shifts in my theoretical allegiances (coming from a background in foreign languages/Languages Other Than English (LOTE), linguistics, and Teaching English to Speakers of Others Languages (TESOL); some reflect accumulated work experience with students
and supervisors (from a marginal position of not really being ‘academic’);³ and some reflect firsthand observations of the cultural insensitivities shown towards CALD⁴ graduate students and the effects of different strategies to improve supervisory practice, and increase students’ satisfaction levels (such as attempts to ‘train’ supervisors and measure students’ satisfaction). Not only is this experience informing my current research, but it is also “part of a continuum that is rooted in my past and extends into the future” (The Dissertation Consortium, 2001: 442). It is also connected to my family through a continuum of intergenerational encounters with ‘exclusionary forces’ mobilised by expert knowers, to be touched on below.

The eyes and ears of power

I first physically encountered large numbers of individual doctoral students and their Tip-exed tomes⁵ when I worked for six months as the temporary secretary to the PhD committee in an Australian sandstone university. It was 1984 and I was in my mid twenties. The students would come to my office to enrol and to submit their theses for examination. Processing was a big part of the job - carrying out the administrative work connected with the registry and examination of doctoral students. The heavy opuses students lugged up the stairs were often in two volumes (and in triplicate). I knew they were important because the bound ones were safely housed in a fireproof cabinet. Word processors were just coming in and my job was to organise the secretarial staff to prepare the agenda and then I recorded and circulated the minutes.

It was a job with a lot of responsibility. There were 457 doctoral students (a third of whom were women) whose candidatures needed overseeing. It was a manual system and the intricately complex regulations needed to be enforced meticulously. Because the committee was involved in matters of scholarship,

³ Student learning advisers occupy a marginal position in Australian Universities, sometimes referred to as the “writing ladies” (Alexander, 2005: 5).
⁴ CALD refers to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse students.
⁵ Before the advent of word processors corrections were done on electric typewriters using a product called ‘Tip-ex’.
every detail of candidature was documented - approval of candidature, changes of candidature, changes of supervisor, approval of thesis titles and appointment of examiners, receipt of examiners’ reports, conflicts with candidates, supervisors and examiners. The part of the job I liked most was sending the letters to confirm the degree had been conferred, especially to the students who had to do corrections. The most contentious aspects were over points of disagreement with the changes suggested by examiners. Hence, it was the issues around revisions which helped me make the connection between power and knowledge and which first alerted me to the politics of textual production. This was evidenced in the delicate and diplomatic responsibility given to supervisors and heads of departments to ensure theses were satisfactorily revised by students before being passed. Most of the ‘problem cases’ were CALD\textsuperscript{6} students as my re-reading of the minutes I took over this period confirms.

Alongside the power issues relating to candidature, I had my own struggles to deal with because it was an all-male committee with the highest status within the university hierarchy. This gender disparity was coupled by my subordinate status as I was positioned as a general staff member there to ‘serve’ the committee. Despite the persistence of male privilege and the exercise of asymmetrical power, I was able to draw strength and support by joining the newly formed University Status of Women Group\textsuperscript{7} which had been established to lobby for improved conditions for women across the university - academic and general staff. We worked with each other regardless of our differences in status, which was a contrast to the ‘us/them’ divide I experienced with the PhD Committee of nine senior, male academic professors. But these were times of change. One of my jobs was to rewrite the PhD regulations to remove the sexist language as EO legislation had been passed. At this time, the university advertised to appoint its first EO Officer, established an EO

\textsuperscript{6} In the mid-eighties small numbers of Columbo Plan sponsored students from developing countries were invited to Australian campuses. In the late eighties there was a surge in the number of fee-paying international students and a continuation of scholarships for small numbers of sponsored students.

\textsuperscript{7} The group sought to challenge the disproportionate representation of women in lower paid positions, to highlight discrimination, sexist language etc.
Committee to implement the new EEO Policy, as well as the establishment of Women’s Studies programs, etc.8

The entrenched disparities of power between the committee and the students played out in various ways. Students had no voice and were treated as ‘objects’ of knowledge. Everything was highly confidential, but this was a very malleable concept as the committee members or supervisors would ring me to get early news of examiners’ reports which would have been ‘leaked’ by the Chair or other committee members. I felt unable to fob them off until things became ‘official’ because the students needed to know (but they were the last ones in the line of whispers). The Chair of the committee was extremely difficult to work with and I recall that learning to write the minutes to his satisfaction was an onerous process. The Chair would give me feedback on my draft minutes or any delicate correspondence which completely disfigured and discounted my efforts. He wanted the documents written in a certain way.

In this respect, I was being apprenticed into the “principles of implicitness” which characterise bureaucratic-administrative discourses (Iedema, 1998: 489). In particular, I learnt that by using particular expressions, which disguised the conflict of interests the committee members might experience,9 the committee was able to enforce the specific accountabilities which ruled that the regulations and procedures were to be followed, irrespective of individual circumstances. In other words, the university could mobilise a kind of management in which the burden of responsibility was on students and supervisors to follow procedure. I was unfamiliar with the genre, and the

8 Thanks to my supervisor Trish Harris for pointing out the way university committees have changed over time and particularly for highlighting the way these changes have corresponded to shifts in institutional values. For example, from the traditional authority of the establishment (as I am describing above) which relies on our acceptance of the regulations and procedures as being beyond questioning (70s-80s), to a more openly democratic and gender-balanced, meritocratic approach (mid 80s to late 90s), to the bleak outlook of the present period in which an accountancy model has taken hold. Such accountability calls supervisors and graduate students to account for their conduct and to calculate their process and knowledge products (achievements, publications, personal flaws, delays to their progress, etc.).

9 I refer to the many roles and functions committee members can enact: as head of department, as office-holder of the committee, as examiner, as reviewer of examiners’ reports, as scrutineer of recommended revisions, as office holder of the committee of appeal. One academic can act in all of the aforementioned capacities.
assumptions guiding these bureaucratic-administrative discourses, as well as the politics which necessitated such spin. These experiences highlighted the ways the bureaucratic organisation of scholarship governed the writing of PhD theses. The preoccupation with positivist, technicist, rationalist models of knowledge infiltrated their management and decision-making in the procedures used to judge students' writing. It deflected attention from the effort of the writing and the craft involved in knowledge production and illustrated the ways “experts diminish the selves of their subjects through their presumptions, prescriptions, and categorisations” (Harris, 1994: 192).

The committee subjected students (and supervisors) to academic rules, norms, and conventions while at the same time overseeing their candidature. This meant that they acted on two fronts. On the one hand, they reduced students to a restricted set of denominators (length of candidature, number of suspensions, examiner recommendations). This information was standardised against university norms and reported in form letters. On the other hand, the committee produced particular subjectivities and capacities since its institutional interactions ensured particular responses, actions and comportments. In mobilising the students to accomplish certain tasks (further revisions, resubmissions, progress reports) the committee sought to get students to identify “as ideal knowing subjects” (Burton & Carlen, 1977: 376 cited in Iedema, 1998: 482). In essence, they produced techniques of self-management which ensured students would conduct themselves according to elaborate protocols. By this identification with particular forms of subjectivity, the students and supervisors were “enlist[ed] to their cause” (Iedema, 1998: 497).

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10 Before length of candidature became part of the Department of Education, Science and Training’s (DEST) agenda, time expectations for doctorates were rather vague. During my time as secretary for the PhD Committee the rules specified that doctorates were to be submitted in no less than three years and no more than five years, yet extensions and suspensions of candidature were routinely approved. For those candidates who were full-time employees and part-time researchers, length of candidature was discretionary and worked out on an individual basis with the department in which the student was enrolled. It was thus more of an expression of a relationship with the department as well as being a process of certification. Scholarships stipulated clear time limits; however, extensions were permitted in clearly-defined circumstances.
The committee was supposed to stand for impartiality in awarding the university’s doctorate. It tried to be fair, but it made decisions without any student representatives, nor women members. It is interesting to speculate on the different decisions which might have been taken with a more diverse membership. How were these decisions affected by the masculinist codes which constituted and constrained members impacting on the committee’s expertise in devising and refining rules to adjudicate individual cases? The committee’s *modus operandi* was to move away from the inevitably ambiguous nature of many of the decisions for which individual judgement was required and to enforce a sense of unity (as in “The committee decided to …”) and objectivity. It was both impersonal and personal and this intrigued me as important decisions were made about students’ research. While the rules and regulations were applied with impartiality and detachment, the committee members often knew the supervisors involved and occasionally some of the students. Within this blend of the impersonal and personal, the power/knowledge fulcrum (the way power and knowledge intersect to imply each other) showed that the balance of control lay with the committee, yet the burden of responsibility lay with students. The committee also had the power to ‘fade out’ individuals who would otherwise be too demanding of their time by reducing them to problem cases who needed to be got off the agenda as quickly as possible.

The workings of the committee bear the traces of the master-apprentice discourse. Paternalism was exercised in decisions about the student’s candidature and in specifying the supervisor’s duties to oversee the realisation of the designated tasks. The committee members were in a position to determine students’ needs on their behalf. Such patronage is emblematic of the tutelage embedded in particular forms of professional practice where decisions are made in the ‘best interests’ of the person. Students were subject to very particular technologies of the self to which they often not always willingly complied. Mostly they did because through diverse techniques of self-discipline students learned that it was reasonable for the committee to rule on these aspects of their candidature because that
was how things were done. Apparently, reasonableness, power, and knowledge were in alignment.

The limits of knowing

This work with the PhD committee has various points of connection with my family experiences which give a sense of the way personal narratives and the retelling of one’s experiences are replayed over time.

I come from a long line of family members who have had uneasy relations with professional knowledges in formal educational contexts and in dealing with professionals in health-related areas. My mother’s university experience as a science student had been abruptly truncated in 1950 when the Dean of the course in which she had enrolled at the University of Queensland telephoned her father (my grandfather) to organise an interview with him to say that she (my mother) could not be accommodated in the practical year of the course. He added that no one would employ a woman agricultural scientist after the six years of study. And so that was the end of it - a promising career in agricultural science was dashed on the basis of this advice, and a successful career in nursing was made possible.

Twenty five years later my eldest brother met the entry requirement but withdrew from his studies at Murdoch University during his first semester because he disliked the partitioning and specialisation of knowledge in the Biological Sciences. To make this point, he explains to me that the smallest group of animals in the biodiversity pie graph (mammals - 0.2% in WA) attract the largest space in a zoology department, the most funding, and are marketed as the most important group of animals simply because they are closest to us. In contrast, the largest group of animals and the most important movers and shakers in most terrestrial ecologies (the insects - 50%) are barely recognised and hardly documented. My brother is an auto-didact and a highly respected, internationally acclaimed photographer and widely published ‘expert’ in his fields of entomology and herpetology (yet without formal credentials). He co-wrote the first Australian photographic reference of
snakes and lizards when he was 26 and currently publishes children’s literature. Without formal credentials some pathways have been blocked, but many others opened as he belongs to a rich and vibrant underground network of expert knowers (‘amateur’ entomologists and herpetologists who are often called on for their expertise). However, these experts are sometimes positioned as deviant others alongside the formally certified experts. Often times they may be overlooked and therefore prohibited from being part of a policy decision-making process.

My father’s educational experience at a private boys’ high school in Queensland had been one of brutality and needing to toughen up to withstand the culture of bullying. I believe his stoicism and defensive response to this experience has kept him away from formal institutions of learning and led to a general disdain for teaching professionals. Such a harsh experience of developing masculinity (with the teachers in _loco parentis_ yet turning a blind eye) is suggestive of the view that “heterosexual masculinity is not an identity that one simply has, but an identification that one must be terrorized into” (Litvak, 1995: 21).

My middle brother was born with talipes (an illness that affects the foot and calf muscle) and was never expected to walk without callipers. My mum’s single-mindedness and determination to fight the medical label to disprove this prediction came to fruition as my middle brother eventually walked strongly unaided. She worked with allied health professionals and learnt to do the daily physio he needed to massage the calf muscles.

My grandmother’s bipolar disorder was not diagnosed until she was in her late 70’s. Up until this time doctors just kept handing over valium prescriptions to pacify her and treat her ‘housewife’s depression and insomnia while our family endured the heartache of not knowing what to do to help.

My great aunt was given one of the first radium treatments for a tumour in her uterus at a Queensland hospital and was burnt with radium because the dose was too high. She spent the rest of her life dependent on a commode.
I raise these educational and health-related matters to draw attention to how experts’ interventions have the capacity to shape people’s lives and profoundly change them, sometimes in deeply damaging ways. These family stories illustrate provisionality of knowledge and the fact that expert knowledge is highly specific in terms of historical contingency. These professionals were products of their time and their professional advice was offered in the ‘best interests’ of the person. It could be said that the Dean was protecting what he considered to be the rightful domain for ‘breadwinning’ men not women, the paediatricians wanted to give my mother a realistic diagnosis of her newborn’s capacities, the radiologists wanted to arrest my great aunt’s cancer, the doctors thought my grandmother’s depression was best treated by numbing her emotional pain. The limits of experts’ knowing are played out in everyday life in manifold ways. These personal biographies illustrate the productive and problematic effects of expert knowledge raising questions as to: Why do we follow or reject expert advice? What makes it harder or easier to resist expert knowledge and under what conditions? The reasons I believe are linked to the ways the professional discourse marks boundaries of reason and sets limits so that a ‘reasonable’ individual would act according to the good sense invoked by these terms. These same rationalities correspond with some of the main themes which have emerged throughout this thesis - the relationships between fear and control, between responsibility and guilt, and between expertise and personal devaluation.

Having also made a career from my credentials and specialist knowledge, I have been apprenticed into particular forms of professional practice and particular technologies of the self. In contrast to other family members, I have found a temporary haven in higher education in the field of student learning and wanted to see if I could belong despite the strong and blunt messages my mother was given. However, I too have had to fight for space to belong, as other women do. I believe forms of discrimination, albeit more

11 Janet Frame suffered immensely under the hands of experts. Whilst a creative genius, she struggled with the stigmatising diagnostic label of schizophrenia (which was eventually overturned). During her hospitalisation she was given ECT (electro-convulsive therapy).
subtle nowadays, have functioned to exclude my expertise and give messages of low priority, as evidenced by the years of short contracts and temporary status. The issue of gender was to have been central to my project because I have often speculated that the way women are treated in supervision, and particularly their experiences of writing and feedback, are pivotal in determining whether they finish their studies, take up academic positions, and what kinds of supervisors they become. However, due to the usual narrowing of the topic, I changed this focus to give more attention to power relations generally. Besides, the small sample size for this qualitative study (seven doctoral candidates and seven supervisors) prohibited such a focus. I asked an interview question about gender and supervisors responded that they had no way of comparing students, either because they had worked almost exclusively with male students or female students, or the small numbers of male students made it difficult to compare.

My professional teaching work as a student learning advisor in several Australian universities brought me into contact with feedback issues, in particular the high levels of anecdotal dissatisfaction with feedback received and supervisory frustration when feedback given is not taken up. As someone who gave feedback to students on their writing in my daily work, I often had misgivings about the influence I had. I became aware of the immense power one has to arbitrate and the privileged position one holds as the author of the feedback. Moreover, the partialities of the adjudicating expert are obscured because students have much invested in the goal of improvement and they will readily subject themselves to become more like the norm of the ‘good’ student (Grant, 1997). For example, when some students explained what supervisors had said in their feedback it was presented as if the revisions were the only options, not as conventions which changed, or terms which could be negotiated, or indications of supervisors’ personal preferences. The apparently excessive powers of the supervisor illustrated my concerns that “expert knowledges [had the] capacity to standardise, categorise, diminish, prescribe, and manage” (Harris, 1994: 177).
In the space of a few weeks in 1996, three international graduate students came for consultations brandishing their supervisor’s written feedback - one was illegible and the comments on each draft were highly annotated and coded or ‘masonic’. For the students the messages were indecipherable and they needed a cultural informant to translate their meanings.¹² The three students were reluctant to go back to their supervisors to request clarification of the comments. In the face of the supervisors’ seemingly non-negotiable offerings, they felt powerless. I started thinking that this putatively direct communicative process - a straightforward ‘exchange’ - had some fundamental problems which were not merely attributable to miscommunication or asymmetrical power.

Thus, the politics of feedback and revision provided the genesis for this research. I had no idea that my initial work in universities would provide the springboard for my research interest and that years later I would enrol in an MPhil and then proceed to write a PhD thesis. Unfortunately, I also had to surrender a focus on transcultural experiences because only one culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) student agreed to participate. One international student who was having problems in supervision was keen to voice her experiences, but as she tried to change the dynamic in her supervision meetings (unsuccessfully), she felt her participation might jeopardise her candidature, and so decided not to participate at the last moment. This particular student’s plight of not being able to gain access to her busy supervisor highlights a typical difficulty for students (MUPSA, 1995).

As well as reporting dissatisfaction with the nature and timeliness of the comments they receive on drafts, another difficulty is for students to exercise autonomy while their feedback-relations are being transacted through the regulation of their textual revisions. The routine work of producing texts and checking in with the supervisor who assists in the ‘cleaning up’ of the student’s texts creates a dependency. With this need to check back with the

¹² In this research postgraduate supervision is conceived of as a particularised pedagogic practice within a mostly dyadic relationship, or more commonly triadic as co-supervision is now required in some schools at Murdoch. However, as we see here students may also invite other parties to read their work.
expert, there is a tension around the transition to and reliance on the student’s own expertise. A supervisor’s feedback assigns the need for the student to ‘own’ the thesis, as well as the need for the student to learn to be self-reliant. This feedback process also ascribes a sense of ownership as the desire to know and be known provides the necessary investment and desire to produce the transformation needed to become an independent scholar. The truth-telling process (through writing a thesis which will make a significant contribution and receiving evaluative comments to appraise this effort) constitutes a technology of power which gives the student freedoms. Ideally, such freedoms include having the power to accept or reject the supervisor’s feedback. In such circumstances, students tend to exercise these freedoms by acknowledging their supervisor’s feedback as truthful rather than partial and hold themselves responsible for following through with the revisions. Exercising these freedoms amplifies the students’ capacities as scholars, and their willing compliance ensures the appropriate literacies and modes of reasoning are developed with little direct intervention. Hence, the valued discipline of self-reflection is practised.

As I have drafted this Introduction within the end stages of my candidature, I begin to feel a sense of acceptance towards imperfection and a disregard towards being given approval. I write to be true to myself (but also for others) and I do not believe I need to argue for this authority in restrictive adversarial terms. Nonetheless, my process of gaining authority and taking ownership of the emerging text has been a somewhat disorienting one. Besides, authorisation is not something which is “fixed and autonomous that writers or writing can possess” (italics in original, Mortensen & Kirsch, 1993: 557). The institution colludes to unsettle the writer’s performance by constructing notions of authority which, on the one hand, are policed by disciplinary norms, while, on the other, are deflected by locating self-responsibility for a “skilled performance” (Rose, 1999a: 242) with the student. This construct of autonomous authority leads to a perpetuation of an individualistic “liberal”

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13 A common technique in academic writing is to set up an authority and then tear it down.
and “accommodationist” (Mortensen & Kirsch, 1993: 557-558) view of authority.\(^{14}\)

Welch (1997) notes that “[c]omposition’s primary verbs for describing the creation of authority in writing - verbs like master, position, situate - position us to work within rather than test these limits” (emphasis in original, p. 98) of authority. A disruption of these secure positions is required and a rethinking of the privileging of supervisor’s knowledge, because this is how students learn they can relate as an expert to the people they will work with/represent (to the students they will supervise) or whatever. John Hughes (2004) writes about his disillusioned perception of his supervisor, as someone who “had relinquished so much of herself” (p. 154) to affirm her attachment to university life. In gaining authority there can be a sacrifice of self, but these binaries (of authority/apprentice, being/becoming) need not exist. I would suggest that one common manifestation of an academic’s insecurity about belonging may harden their attachments and make an academic’s claim of authority appear as if his or her ‘master’s voice’ is definitive rather than a matter of partiality. That is not to discredit the valuable and constructive feedback which many students are given.

In supervision, as I have shown from my personal experience of university life and the layers of governance within university structures which are involved in the processes of certifying future expert knowers, doctoral students and supervisors are affected by the exercise of power relations which are asymmetrical, relational, and productive. Further, through the mapping of the particular ways professional knowledges in supervision can have debilitating effects - namely, their capacity to leave students feeling anxious, personally devalued, or unable to act - I will explore the realms of practice in supervision that produce these different reactions. Hence, the major themes which will emerge throughout this thesis include the relations between supervisors’ ‘craft knowledges’ and the pastoral, institutional, and disciplinary contexts of supervision. The insights obtained from conducting

\(^{14}\) The liberal critique of authority is unable to explain the asymmetrical distribution of power in different communities (Mortensen & Kirsch, 1993: 557).
this qualitative study are grounded in an empirical analysis of expert knowledge and the productive implications of positioning the student as a subordinate in the dialogue. The study reports on the ways in which the process of authorising gives important instructional assistance and also has contradictory effects, such as when resistant behaviours are deployed.

As the ‘owner’ of this thesis text and as someone who is bidding for entry into academic spheres, I too am an object of feedback as are my supervisors as they enact their feedback on the emergent thesis text. The process of authorisation I have experienced has provided plentiful freedoms and opportunities for dialogue with scholars in diverse disciplines. The feedback I have been given has helped me realise that autonomy and interdependence are compatible, although the norms which have individualist constructions of the self in mind have a strong pulling power.

Finally, in terms of my theorisation of the pedagogies of feedback in supervision being developed in this thesis, the supervisor’s feedback is the main technology which authorises the graduate student. Through its regulatory mechanisms and endorsement of the student’s transformation, particular social relations are played out to form an intelligible academic subjectivity. I wish to draw attention to the perturbations of this authorisation process when there is a pretense of the student’s autonomy while there is help provided by supervisors. The issue of ownership/authorship has surfaced and become a central theme in this research. Hence, questions relating to how the supervisor’s feedback ties students to normative and restrictive identities (such as negative individualism and stoic self-reliance), to secure this process have taken a central place.

With these aims in mind, I ask you to read this thesis as a speculative study of a process that has many difficult elements to configure. I also invite you as the reader to recapture the sense of disquiet about the process of authorisation which you too may have experienced in your scholarly formation. For as Kritie Fleckenstein comments: “Writers need to perceive the desires or expectations their texts arouse in their projected readers” (The
Dissertation Consortium, 2001: 442). With the work of conjuring a hopefully curious audience now done, through having declared my project, and introduced the personal and professional experiences which launched it, I will now introduce the study in more detail.

**An overview of an ‘under’ study**

The thesis has two main parts to reflect the changes of mood and various themes taken up in the ensuing account of the pedagogies of feedback in supervision. Part One introduces the study, and presents the theoretical and methodological concerns influencing the disciplinary framing of my research. This section introduces the socio-discursive régimes and overarching principles or larger meaning systems through the modern practices of governmentality (following Foucault) which mediate the cultural practices of supervision.

Chapter 2 outlines the study’s context and current perceptions of supervisory feedback against the backdrop of the contemporary institutional pressures affecting supervision. It also provides a detailed account of the interpretive framework and theoretical perspectives. In Chapter 3, I discuss methodological issues and outline the combination of methods used to work with the interview data and interpretive strategies used for the analyses.

Part Two presents the interview data through a series of micro analyses of the texts to explore the individual patterns of meaning-making in the participants’ accounts of their work together. In each of the five mini ‘under’ studies I use a different prism with which to refract different meanings attached to feedback practices and reflect their changing patterns and forms. Metaphors, thematic constructions and analytical categories are used to disrupt the governmental apparatuses described in Part One to show how supervision is played out differently when the dynamic intersections of choice, chance, personal biography, and institutionally-mediated relations are set in motion. In Foucaultian terms, my aim is to describe the interplay between institutional discourses and the ‘dividing practices’ that constitute local subjectivities and their worlds of experience. In each chapter I place a
different emphasis on power relations to explore the various feedback techniques which fashion the self-disciplines students and supervisors take up. The undercurrent which pervades each depiction of supervision confirms Grant’s (2005b) finding that while the “asymmetrical structure may be troublesome in some ways, for both supervisor and student, it is also vital to the production of knowledge and to getting the work done (p. 27)”.

More specifically, Chapter 4 traces how students and supervisors face new pressures which are impacting on their feedback practices. The discussion is framed around debates regarding timely completions and the prospect that supervisory feedback may be becoming more textually intrusive and directive in order to keep students writing and get them to complete their work on time.

In Chapter 5, through an analysis of Foucault’s concept of pastoral power, I read interview responses to identify the strategies supervisors use to safeguard students against the risks and uncertainties of thesis production. I identify tensions associated with these which show the contradictory dimensions of their feedback-relations and the inherently ambiguous nature of the supervision process.

Chapter 6 explores the tensions implicit in the unsteady process of becoming an authorised academic subject and being authoritative via the contradictory expectations underpinning postgraduate pedagogy. While becoming properly authorised, the student is dependent on the supervisor’s enunciative authority through their supervisory feedback; yet they are simultaneously expected to be self-authorising, demonstrating creativity and originality and contributing to contemporary repositories of knowledge.

In Chapter 7 I explore the ways that ownership and authorisation are often explicitly cued by supervisors. I discuss the supervisors’ use of mechanisms of ownership for the creation of ‘self-responsible’ students who will make the ‘right’ decisions when supervisors offer feedback through encouraging a sense of personal control. I argue that these ways of interpelling students may
affect how authority is perceived and responded to. In developing the concept of ‘under offering’, I elaborate how resistance to feedback may be made more or less likely.

Chapter 8 discusses two assumptions about the meanings of supervisory feedback when there is a communicative distance because of the indirect nature of language and unavoidable power asymmetry. I foreground the elements of transparency and mystery that pervade all supervision discourses and discuss dominant and emergent discourses and their hybrid formations to suggest that variations in feedback practice ensure that supervision is a discursively rich pedagogy. I also discuss the gap between practice and intention to argue that the norms of supervisors’ feedback are implicit and this makes their comments authoritative as well as difficult for students to challenge.

Finally, in Chapter 9 I discuss the central issues emerging from the previous chapters and I speculate on the possibility of refiguring the contradictory systems of demands these interchanges produce. This last chapter invites new dialogues about supervision so that a student’s success is more than a matter of individual endowment and implicit learning criteria (Johnson et al., 2000). It can be based on teaching, learning and co-operation. I propose a hopeful and cautious view of the social relations which affect the meanings students do and do not make in their texts and the kind of self-formation this entails (i.e. away from negative individualism or isolation).

In tunneling under the pedagogies of feedback to provide ‘a worm’s-eye view’ in the various readings of the interview data, I work my way across institutional, pedagogic and literate sites of practice to reveal how institutional power relations are given a “consistent character” (Gore, 1997: 653). In drawing these themes together, I intend to provide glimpses of feedback practices which suggest that there are qualities that can be achieved and owned through the adoption of a rationality of self-responsibility and an economy of the self, but which are forever being displaced by life’s messyness.
Chapter 2

Theoretical basis

a male graduate student:
... I’ve been extremely lucky, fortunate I should say, in having the supervisor-student relationship that I had with my supervisor. And having the sort of feedback that I’ve had from my supervisor. I’ve heard of so many other students’ experiences and when I say: “Well, that’s not how we do it.” or “No, my supervisor would do this.” And they say: “God, you’re lucky”. So I realise how fortunate I’ve been in the process.

(Student Y, I/V3, Q28: 80)

a female graduate student:
My Master’s supervisor (W) almost sort of wrote my thesis for me. I would come with work and W, of course it was a he, would rewrite my sentences and that was entirely too much power on W’s part, and even though we were actually colleagues at the time as well, which is interesting. ... W didn’t show respect for what I was capable of and I don’t know whether W thought it was W’s role or what; nothing was right about what I’d done. And I think that’s completely inappropriate because at the end of the day it’s your work, and I know supervisors’ reputations are tied up with how well their students do, but I think students have to have some opportunities to do their own work and write for themselves.

(Student G, I/V3, Q26: 72)

a female supervisor:
... it’s a very tricky relationship because it’s still a relationship of supervisor and student so it’s not an equal relationship and I think to pretend that it is, is really wrong because then when you give feedback which says: “Look I think you just have to reshape this chapter, it’s not going to be, I can’t see how it’s going to be acceptable to examiners that way, or you’ve got to go out and do more research in this area.” I don’t think it’s going to work. ... And so it’s not an equal relationship, but as far as possible I try and make it a friendly one.

(Supervisor Q, I/V1, Q2A: 58)

a male supervisor:
And of course [supervision] varies with your own mood, externalities and other sorts of things, how much sleep you’ve had. So you make mistakes. But PhD students really listen and they’re really sensitive. And you’ve got to be careful and I’m not always as careful as I should be. But sometimes it works OK because sometimes it’s driven by sort of intuitions, gut feelings of particular moments, and sometimes you go out on a limb and sort of try something and say something that you know is going to be a bit provocative and you just don’t know whether it will work or not. No matter how hard you try you never quite get their psyche.

(Supervisor M, I/V1, Q6: 16)
Introduction

This chapter discusses my theoretical framework for conceptualising supervisory feedback relations. It involves poststructural notions of discourse, subjectivity and identity and draws predominantly from a Foucaultian framework. The concepts are used to illuminate the complex politics associated with the formation or production of academic identities in the specific site of an Australian university. My intention is to convey some of the diverse tensions and struggles for graduate students and supervisors (reflected partially by the range of views of the four research participants in the opening epigraphs). To tease out the interplays and explore the ambiguous relationships invested within them, I assume that supervisory discourses are accomplished “through the meaning systems forming our cultural and social context” (Jones, 1997: 268), with implications for the ways the protagonists understand themselves as students and supervisors and behave in the ways they do. I also pay careful attention to the institutional context through and within which these relations are formed.

The interpretive framework outlined in the ensuing account has four major components. First, I turn to my basic building blocks - notions of discourse and pedagogy, where I describe the postlinguistic approach employed in this thesis. This approach underpins my notion of supervisory feedback as a practical course of action, with its particular comportments and knowledge base. Second, I introduce Foucault’s notions of discipline, normalisation, and subjectification. These constructs are used to show how power is exercised to promote autonomy and self-responsibility. Third, I discuss Foucault’s notions of governmentality and expert knowledge to place the analysis in its particular historical and institutional context and as a means of drawing out the particular rationalities of expert knowledges imbued in supervisory feedback relations. Finally, I discuss the notions of pastoral power and ‘confession’ as a means of illuminating an ensemble of therapeutic discourses including particular modes of dialogue, observation, assessment, and documentation.
The building blocks: discourse and pedagogy

Pedagogic discourses carry the investments of their agents - supervisors and students - and their effects are superimposed in actual decisions, institutions, and practices. Their particular régimes of ‘truth’ are thus concomitantly régimes of ‘practice’, with their actions and behaviours “codifying effects regarding what is to be known” (Foucault, 1994a: 225). In noting this it is important to observe three things. First, pedagogic discourses are linked to wider institutional and social practices. They sustain particular readings in alliance with these wider regulatory mechanisms and have material effects due to the mechanisms supervisors can draw on to back them up (e.g. sanctions, rewards, prescriptions, rationality, punishments, withholding information etc.) Second, students are subject to the practical intentions and purposes of their supervisors’ feedback, for “knowledge is never purely ‘theoretical’: it is always - and already - practical in its intentions and effects” (Harris, 1994: 41). Wolin (1991) points out that a discursive formation comprises “practices and institutions that produce knowledge claims that the system of power finds useful” (p. 184). In this way, discourse unites thought and practice in a seamless and circular web: Practices set the conditions for discourse and discourse feeds back statements that will facilitate practice. Discourse appears completely incorporated into practice. It has no autonomous identity or distance. (Wolin, 1991: 184)

Third, through invoking particular rhetorical devices supervisors ‘persuade’ or ‘invite’ certain readings and meanings while occluding others. In Chapter 7, I elaborate on the rhetorical device of ‘under offering’ by which supervisors seek to distance themselves from their investment in the feedback offered to elicit students’ co-operation and increase the likelihood that the feedback will be taken up.

These observations cluster well under the view of pedagogy I wish to adopt. This is one which acknowledges the variety of mechanisms used to sustain
particular readings and the material effects and practical mechanisms supervisors have at their disposal, the practical intentions which are enshrined in their pedagogic practices, and the persuasive possibilities of their feedback. In this thesis, I work with this broad and dynamic view of pedagogy as opposed to a narrow conception of supervision as knowledge transmission, which leads to a belief that the student absorbs knowledge from the all-knowing supervisor through “a sort of intellectual osmosis” (Connell, 1985a: 53). Construing supervision as a pedagogy of knowledge production and interactive relations opens up for consideration questions about the instrumental benefits as well as specific supervisor-student-knowledge practices and relations. On this, Lusted (1986: 4) explains that knowledge is *produced* in the process of interaction “between teacher and learner at the moment of classroom engagement”. Bill Green (2005: 152) suggests that the “primacy of pedagogy” thesis is now widely endorsed across the social sciences. He writes:

One can justifiably ask: *Why pedagogy?* What is at issue in mobilising pedagogy, as a key term of reference across the social space of education and in particular of doctoral education? It is important to recognise that pedagogy is much more than simply ‘teaching’, embracing and encompassing the multiple message-systems of curriculum and linked inextricably to the social dynamics of learning. Part of the challenge has been to make a case for this larger sense of the pedagogic, knowing full well that it has historically been devalued or dismissed - an (un)necessary supplement (Lee & Green, 1997a). (Green, 2005: 152)

In line with this, I argue that supervision pedagogies have important teaching and learning functions that place supervisors in particular positions and aim to form students as particular kinds of knowing subjects, with particular capacities, identities and subjectivities. The supervisor’s disciplinary field is a core organising principle for constructing feedback aiming to govern research practices, thinking, and practical craft knowledge. It cultivates particular

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15 Green is referring to the seminal paper by David Lusted (1986).
capacities, literacies and modes of reasoning in students, establishes the parameters of student-supervisor feedback relations, and privileges particular styles and forms of writing.

Further, the relations between pedagogy and the institutional practices of disciplinarity suggest that in supervision subjects become actively involved in “learning to learn” (Hoskin, 1993: 277). For doctoral students, learning how to learn derives from the principles of writing, assessment, examination and self-management. At the same time, the student is rendered ‘knowable’ “as individuals within different ‘normalized populations’” (Hoskin, 1993: 295). Above all, doctoral students are to ‘know themselves’ (even to compete against themselves) through self-knowledge gleaned from their supervisors’ feedback. This is the point to which I now turn.

Scholars in the making - subject formation

In this thesis, I engage a postlinguistic approach to explore the relations between student, supervisor, text and examiner. The five principles of an applied postlinguistic approach to text are:

Language and literacy are always political (1); texts and literacy practices are always embedded in social contexts (2); there is a focus on production and reception of texts (3); power is that which must be explained; textual analysis is social analysis (4); pedagogical and analytical praxis aim to develop ways in which students can resist and change the discourses that construct their lives (5). (Pennycook, 2001: 112)

In this context, my focus is on the dialogues enacted through the research/writing/feedback process. When feedback is transacted there are proscribed ways through which students must learn to negotiate their desires concerning “what they want to do, what they want to say, who they want to be” as one supervisor in the study put it (Supervisor M, I/V3, Q18: 52). In view of this construction of the constrained yet autonomous student, an important
The feedback supervisors provide is a regulated communication and there is an inevitable recycling of talk when it is delivered. Language researchers argue that we mostly use already rehearsed speech which gives the illusion of being improvised. As Emmison (1989) concludes, “[o]ur natural conversations are not only rehearsed and scripted but significantly we use “already-delivered” talk - heard or read, ‘real’ or ‘fictional’ - in the formation of our utterances” (p. 379). Extending this, we can say that a supervisor’s feedback is made up of lines that have already been uttered and these dialogues are scripted and pre-rehearsed by the supervisor in various other contexts. At the same time, as Grant (2005b) has shown through her analysis of supervision dialogues, there are possibilities for improvising and spontaneity. In her words, these highlight “the reciprocal and creative aspects of the supervisor-student relation that may well be crucial to the re-constitution of both student as researcher and the terms and boundaries of the discipline” (Grant, 2005b: 27).

The advanced literacies developed through routine textual negotiations between supervisors and students are accomplished through a variety of discursive practices in the context of a web of institutional disciplinary expectations and asymmetrical power relations. From this perspective, the social-discursive practices of learning emerge as socially and culturally constructed rather than as individual acts. Yet it is also true that supervision-as-pedagogy is an individualised pedagogy since supervision is an exclusive ‘care’ (pastoral) relationship. Its prolonged and intimate nature makes it a distinctive kind of professional relationship. In fact, it is the unusual blending of the professional and the personal which as Grant (2005b) has argued “makes supervision particularly complex (and potentially difficult as well as pleasurable) in comparison to other forms of university pedagogy” (p. 6).

Insight into the relationship between expert knowledge and its subjects and the kinds of agency being attributed to the subjects of supervision can, in its
turn, help reveal changing assumptions about the workings of those pedagogic ‘economies’ which engineer students towards the prudent use of feedback and certain economies of the self. I thus turn to Foucault’s work on discipline, expert knowledge and the self.

The disciplinary technologies and regulation of the self

Foucault’s interpretation of citizen formation and the control of populations derives from his historical analysis of the shift to disciplinary technologies which occurred with the emergence of industrial capitalism (Foucault, 1994b, 1994c). In the shift from juridical and sovereign power formations and ‘life taking’, there was a move to technologies that were exercised over individuals and populations to produce certain behaviours. With the advent of the modern state, new ‘life giving’ technologies of power which sought to preserve life and “invest life through and through” (Foucault, 1976a: 139) emerged. The devolution to these new technologies of power stems from “two poles of development” (p. 139). On one side, an “anatomo-politics of the human body” was clustered around the individual body, “its disciplining ... [and] the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility”. On the other side, there was a “bio-politics of the population” (Foucault, 1976a: 139) forming “the species of the body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life ... propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary” (p. 13).

Foucault’s (1979) concept of disciplinary power which operates corporally and in conjunction with ‘technologies of the self’ (Martin, Gutman, & Hutton, 1988) provides a conceptual frame with which to analyse the nuances of power relations. The progression of the modern field of power Foucault traces in his work - a movement from disciplinary controls to the ‘technologies of the self’ - charts the ascendance of a more active and self-responsible subject. Foucault defines ‘technologies of the self’ as:
permit[ting] individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Martin et al., 1988: 15).

In relation to this, supervisors are involved in positioning students to comply with the goals and processes of the broader professional project. At the same time the strategies associated with these technologies are designed to encourage the active participation of subjects (Harris, 1994). Thus students actively participate in fashioning their own academic subjectivity and choose to impose disciplines upon themselves and undertake to comply with these goals and processes without coercion. To work towards achieving these aims, supervisors are expected to draw from a repertoire of techniques including face to face supervision, motivational techniques, assessment and diagnostic tools, etc.

A principal objective of modern disciplinary power is to “qualify, measure, appraise and hierarchize”; and this power operates through “effect[ing] distributions around the norm” (Foucault, 1976a: 144). Here the science of statistics plays a crucial role in calibrating and evaluating normality. Through various techniques working in conjunction with a distributive process, individuals are positioned and categorised according to the statistical norm (Rabinow, 1984: 20; Rose, 1999a: 6). The powerful regulatory and normative effects associated with these calculations allow behavioural experts to remediate and reform while encouraging self-corrective behaviours. The distributive process, I will show in Chapter 4 “Under pressure”, is effected in supervision through increasing use of milestones, progress reports, and the stipulation of word quotas. Students, supervisors, and administrators must furnish, monitor, and calculate evidence of students’ progress to ensure timely completions. Less evident and accessible, due to the private nature of the transactions, is the supervisor’s feedback which also embodies productions of normality through the yardstick of disciplinary judgement.
The crux of the argument, then, is that the effects of normalising strategies activate a process of internalisation whereby “institutional discourses both construe and presuppose increasing degrees of identification … with institutional values, positions and meanings” (Iedema, 1998: 482). In achieving this congruence with institutional objectives, the process works by partially veiling the experts’ power. The effect of this concealment makes it seem as if the decisions are individually and voluntarily attained (John, 1990).

Aspects of this strategy are present in supervision. It works through students aligning their desires and aspirations with those of their supervisor, so that through their identification and congruence there is a less overt need for disciplinary measures. In supervision self-discipline is realised through the student’s capacity to function without the supervisor’s direct intervention and works in tandem with the student being ready to “take on pedagogical norms as personal desires” (Hunter, 1996a: 7) through their investment in a scholarly subjectivity, thus becoming “a certain sort of person” (Couzens Hoy, 1986: 15).

Relying on a ‘confessional mode’ of exchange, as well as written documentation, the supervisor builds up a picture of the student’s capacities. It is this combination of dialogue and written offerings that allows the supervisor to know each student’s history and learning capabilities. At the same time, dialogue plays a central role in supervision interactions in ‘talking students into being’ these subjects. For “to speak is to assume a subject position within discourse and to become subjected to the power and regulation of the discourse” (Weedon, 1997: 116). Heritage (2004) asserts that: “The epistemological superiority of expert knowledge is something that is recurrently renewed in talk and in many different ways” (p. 239). In becoming a student subject, individuals are invited to speak, but the range of discourses available to speak through is limited. This idea of being “talked

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16 Foucault’s use of the confessional highlights how this mode “has become fundamental to ‘scientific’ investigation and knowledge” (Weedon, 1997: 116). Because ‘checking in’ and ‘being checked’ and ‘self-checking’ are fundamental pedagogic tasks, students’ progress and their changing psychological states become matters of public exchange.
Foucault pinpoints the subject’s capacity for both ‘authorship’ and ‘subjection’, suggesting that the “technology of power uses individuals as both the objects and the instruments of its exercise” (Foucault, 1979: 170). In this respect, he elaborates on “two meanings of the word ‘subject’: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his [sic] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to.” (Foucault, 1994b: 331) Subjectification therefore embodies a certain ambiguity of the “subject” due to being simultaneously the subject of and subject to power. In supervision, it is this twin process that enables students and supervisors to take up various subject positions as well as making each other possible and necessary.

Foucault’s account of the constitutive nature of power, with its “productive” (Foucault, 1994c: 120-121) effects, has significantly shifted the directions of sociological thought by provoking a rethinking of the relationship between power and knowledge. For Foucault insists that:

[w]e must cease once and for all to describe the effects in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’. In fact, power produces; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. (1979: 194)

In this constitutive sense, power joins with knowledge to valorise scientific discourse (Foucault, 1980b), and produce a hierarchy of knowledge embodying judgements about truth and falsity. Certain people are qualified to speak, while others are disqualified; certain knowledges are valued, while others are devalued. Self-understanding requires the help of experts to bring about self-knowledge. The triangular networks of truth/power/knowledge stem from, and are managed by, a vast array of administrative and social domains and pervade all aspects of life. They operate to infuse “private life with the
language of government ... [w]hich brings the relationship between the state, the professional project, and ‘subject-as-citizens’ more clearly into focus” (Harris, 1994: 21). The discourse of government has productive possibilities and manifests in the discourses of supervision and the layers of governance to which students and supervisors are subject. As Harris (1997a) comments: “These channel the apparently self-directed and independent student toward certain views and practices, and make specific claims within which the calls to independent thought and self-directed study practices are to be understood and followed” (p. 2).

**Expert knowledge and governmental processes and practices**

In his analysis of the modern state Foucault concentrates on the means whereby populations are governed through the support of various institutions and programmes. McCarthy (1993) explains that “what is distinctive of the modern disciplinary regime”, in Foucault’s view, “is just the way in which coercion by violence has been largely replaced by the gentler force of administration by scientifically trained experts” (p. 51). In this vein Allen (1991) specifies that the power exercised by those who are authorised to speak is

> a power we experience today above all as the truths of norms and chances: the expert’s truth concerning what is average or deviant, safe or dangerous, same or different. A massive discourse of disciplinary judgement ... contributes to the government of conduct as never before. (p. 428)

In essence, the regulatory functions of expert knowledge are designed to bring security and stability and counteract uncertainty in our everyday lives. The primacy of experts as a source of behavioural control can be traced to the emergence and growth of the ‘social’ in the late 19th century (Harris, 1994). With the dissolution of sovereign power and the emergence of social issues associated with industrialisation and urbanisation, there was a move towards
a form of social regulation which emphasised discipline, self-regulation and expert knowledge (Foucault, 1979).

Expert knowledge has two principal functions: the first is to calculate and assess an individual’s capacities with the aid of formal techniques; the second is to transform and maximise the capacities of its subjects through behavioural regulation (Foucault, 1979; Rose, 1999a). A diverse range of mechanisms supports these functions of assessment and transformation. Harris' (1994) study of contemporary expert knowledges governing domestic and personal relationships suggests that the notion of ‘order’ is central to the expert project and “expert knowledges govern through their assertions of certainty, predictability, rationality, and control” (p. 8). These rationalities foreground personal responsibility and work in alliance with distinct and functionally specialised, disciplinary knowledges which, I will argue, in the university domain, are premised on a ‘rational’ exchange of information in making knowledge claims. Furthermore, the supervisor’s contribution to these practices of government is premised on promises of security and personal control.

As “an historically established system for the distribution of social power and privilege” (Scollon, 1995: 25), the university is a domain in which expertise has a firm hold - the valued status of knowledge production creates possibilities for experts to produce worthwhile knowledge with both liberating and subordinating potentials. The production of experts is the university’s core business and the doctoral credential is marked as an important artefact of academic achievement - a license for certified scholars to practise as expert knowers and prepare future scholars who will continue the cycle of knowledge creation.

Foucault’s notion of ‘governmentality’ is derived from a combination of the terms ‘government’ and ‘mentality’ in an attempt “to cover in a single word the ideas of a new mentality in relation to government as well as a new governmental rationality” (Kendall & Wickham, 1996: 218). Here, the art of governing “is to structure the possible field of action of others” (Foucault,
1994b: 341). He argued that with the need to provide stable and harmonious conditions, the state and various professional and regulatory bodies forge close relations, and target individuals as well as populations more broadly. Thus, teaching professionals are actively involved in building social solidarity and harmony which links them to the governing apparatus. They “have at their disposal a wide range of strategies designed to mould the personal capacities of citizens to particular political ends such as order, security, profitability, and efficiency” (Harris, 1994: 23). Rose’s (1999a) thesis is that “the psycho[logical] disciplines and psy expertise have had a key role in constructing ‘governable subjects’ … making it possible to govern human beings in ways that are compatible with the principles of liberalism and democracy” (p. vi).

The array of techniques used in supervision is discussed in detail in Chapter 6 and 7, where I show how students are to be responsible and to ‘own’ their own decisions and arguments, and solve errors of their own making. A proliferation of governmental techniques targeting whole populations sits alongside these interventions with the “insurantial techniques” (Kendall & Wickham, 1996: 205) replacing in part the older neo-liberal disciplinary measures. These newer techniques form part of the move in their capacity to incite individuals to take care of their own prospects.

Governmentality, Foucault (1994d) argues, works to secure populations through “the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, and so on” (p. 217). Such processes entail foreseeing and controlling the future. Significantly, as Kendall and Wickham (1996) suggest, the practice of governing is “perpetual because it is always incomplete, it never totally succeeds; fortune continues to produce problems” (p. 203). The inevitability of uncertainty foils efforts to ‘manage our fortuna’, since uncertainty will “inevitably reintroduce itself in different forms and places; and every reappearance of uncertainty will reactivate the desire to govern” (Harris, 1994: 24).

Drawing from these insights, this thesis pays attention to the way in which the candidature of graduate students is governed by a range of codes and
practices which operate with varying degrees of specificity. On the one hand, there are a diffuse group of prescriptive and disciplinary norms relating to such things as the length, frequency and content of their meetings. These provide “loosely defined, yet pervasive, academic canons which provide signposts to ‘better’ or ‘worse’ ways of thinking and modes of expression” (Harris, 1997a: 2). On the other, there are more particularised and formal norms including official documents such as the university handbooks, codes of practice, supervision agreements or contracts and administrative policies. These monitor standards and establish norms for the appropriate conduct of supervisory relations. They specify the rate at which the thesis is to be written and the necessary self-disciplines students need to exercise to be able to motivate themselves and regulate their own work practices within these tensions and constraints. I also note that the ethos of the autonomous subject may mask the disciplinary and prescriptive measures to which graduate students are thus subject.

To summarise so far: in this thesis a Foucaultian perspective provides insights into the expansive sets of power/knowledge relations embedded in professional interests. It also reveals how power operates through rationalities which appeal to our emotions, psychological makeup, and individual capacities. It captures the techniques of regulation, normalisation, and mechanisms of security which guide the scaffolding work performed by the “experts of the soul” (Rose, 1999a: 11), drawing attention to specialist tools such as statistical information, tables, graphs, interviewing techniques and, in the context of this thesis, specific pedagogic practices. More broadly, Foucault’s idea of the ‘two poles’ - ‘the technologies of the self’ and ‘regulation of populations’ illustrates how the pedagogic interventions of supervisors effected at an individual level link up with the broader colonising processes of professional knowledge. Most significantly, his analytics of power shows how the governmental practices, even when practised under the name of freedom and personal autonomy can “re-position people into tighter forms of regulation and self-regulation” (Usher & Edwards, 1994: 84). This latter consideration is particularly salient for my study as it draws attention to the
capacity for the active incorporation of subjects into the professional project and hence their personal involvement in their own regulation.

The capacity for resistance has been ignored thus far, perhaps creating an impression that the power/knowledge networks and their regulatory mechanisms have a totalising effect (McCarthy, 1993). Indeed, as Harris (1994) explains “the focus of most Foucaultian studies is on the conditions which construct the subject rather than on the subject him or herself, and thus on the mechanisms of regulation rather than the conditions of resistance” (p. 25). Overlooking individuals’ responses to the disciplinary technologies and disregarding the diverse ways in which individuals constitute themselves vis à vis forces of knowledge and power relations, disregards how, on Foucault’s own account, resistance is the necessary counter stroke to power. Following this, I am cautious about exaggerating the inevitability of the effects of disciplinary society and evoking a too disciplined subject. I revisit these issues in Chapter 6 where I note that there are disparate forms of resistance such as refusing to do the work required, changing the supervisor, seeking other opinions, taking risks and accepting responsibility for opposing opinions. Acts of resistance occur under conditions in which the student’s sense of self is ruptured, or their freedom to choose is restrained, or the feedback conflicts with the meanings they wish to suggest, or where there is uncertainty that threatens to destabilise the becoming scholar’s identity. However, I am also mindful that students need to ‘keep’ their supervisors and their reliance on them may limit their capacities for resistance and lead to their submission to supervisory authority. This need for the supervisor’s protection, approval and reassurances in the face of uncertainty complicates their relations.

I turn now to the assemblage of protective practices which suggest the ways subjects are shaped rather than determined by networks of power/knowledge (Usher & Edwards, 1994).
I turn now to the assemblage of protective or pastoral practices through which subjects are shaped by the networks of power/knowledge (Usher & Edwards, 1994).

**Pastoral protection**

In his discussion of the pastoral, Foucault (1986: 341) highlights the historical emergence of the Christian technologies of the self and the new relations of power they introduce. He suggests that the pastoral form of power has the following characteristic features:

- [it] is salvation-oriented (as opposed to political power). It is oblative [involves sacrifice or a sacred offering]17 (as opposed to the principle of sovereignty); it is individualizing (as opposed to legal power); it is coextensive and continuous with life; it is linked to the production of truth - the truth of the individual himself [sic].(Foucault, 1994b: 333)

In tracing its archaic lineages to the modern era, Foucault (1994d: 221) shows how pastoral power has become an important technique of government. The goal of governmental power, through the exercise of the pastoral techniques, “is to constantly ensure, sustain, and improve the lives of each and every one” (Foucault, 1994e: 307). In this respect pastoral power is characterised by the pastor’s “kindness” and “devotedness” and a constant concern for each and every member of the flock who are watched over. Foucault (1994e: 300) draws attention to the “constant, individualized, and final kindness” (p. 302) of the shepherd, who attends to the nourishment of the flock leading them to good land for grazing and then bringing them back to the fold (Foucault, 1994e: 302). In supervision, ‘final kindness’ can be said to equate with bringing the student to good grazing land, while being ‘brought back to the fold’ equates with the disciplines exercised to cultivate the desired scholarly capacities.

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17 In supervision I propose that what is being offered is the chance to be autonomous and free to think and express those thoughts publically.
Charged with ameliorative responsibilities, the pastor’s job is to attend to “the care of others” (1986: 370). The characteristic features of this form of power are that its pastors promise to take care of the well-being of subjects in exchange for information and confidence in and obedience to some form of higher authority, belief system or set of ideals. Foucault (1994b) asserts that the modern state now occupies the position of the pastor offering salvation through the provision of “health, well being ... security, protection against accidents” (p. 334). Pastoral power which was originally linked “to a defined religious institution, suddenly spread out into the whole social body ... and it found support in a multitude of institutions” (Foucault, 1994b: 335). In universities, the pastoral relation is promoted through the disciplines of ethical self-reflection and self-cultivation, accomplished through research and writing, with ‘salvation’ promised in the achievement of the disciplines involved. Within the confines of this specialised supervised relationship, “a limited but important range of literate and ethical abilities can be formed” (Hunter, 1996a: 5).

In being bound to the pastor who ‘serves’ the individual, the technique of pastoral power represents “a transaction [whereby] the individual reveals the truth about him or herself” (Howley & Hartnett, 1992: 273). Foucault (1994e) explains this submission of will as being one of absolute dependence:

In Christianity the tie to the shepherd is an individual one. It is a personal submission to him. His will is done, not because it is consistent with the law, and not just as far as it is consistent with it, but, principally, because it is his will. ... Obedience is a virtue ... and end in itself. It is a permanent state; the sheep must permanently submit to their pastors. (emphasis in original, pp. 308-309)

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Foucault (1986) explains that when Christianity took up the culture of the self “it was, in a way, put to work for the exercise of a pastoral power to the extent that the epimeleia heautou [taking care of oneself] became essentially epimeleia tonallon - the care of others - which was the pastor’s job” (p. 370).
Thus pastors and parishioners are bound by relations of dependency and obedience. Obedience has a specific character in Christianity - it is a lifelong practice. In the earlier form of pastoral power, parishioners were excluded from judging their own revelations (except in terms of evil or sinful intentions). The goal of obedience and submission to the will of the pastor was governed by a ‘higher’ system of rules, with the pastor acting as intermediary. Obeying the rules guaranteed future salvation and kept the pastorate compliant and docile. In the modern exercise of pastoral power, however, the ‘higher order’ includes the autonomy and self-discipline of the parishioner and thus power and discipline are exercised through the subject’s active involvement in the professional project and through their learning to exercise power upon themselves. Foucault defined autonomy in non-essentialised terms: “Rather than resulting from some innate potential, our autonomy is always influenced and determined by the contingent circumstances of our historical existence - which includes the presence of others” (Infinito, 2003: 167).

In the context of supervision, students’ faith in God is replaced by faith in the supervisor’s expert knowledge which will ‘shepherd’ the student towards this autonomous state and improved well-being. Because universities prefer to wield normative rather than carceral power (Howley & Hartnett, 1992), they aim to achieve the situation whereby students internalise the obligations imposed on them. Non-coercive correction obviates the need for the imposition of external sanctions. In this way, modern education by-passes “pre-modern coercion and subjugation” (p. 100) although “these forms never entirely disappear” (Usher & Edwards, 1994: 84). Reflecting this shift, Hunter (1988) describes the changes in the teacher-student relation as: “[r]emoving the teacher from his or her position as remote overseer and transforming him or her into a sympathetic figure able to combine discipline with the familiarity of the friend or parent” (p. 14). Elaborating on this point, Simola, Heikkinen and Silvonen (1998) suggest that modern power in educational contexts “invites and induces, declaring and underscoring a right to learning”

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19 To illustrate the enduring nature of the supervision relationship, Acker (2001) notes that among the very great demands placed on supervisors is the expectation of the supervisor “remaining an active mentor for years to come” (p. 65).
working “inductively and invitingly rather than through coercion and command, positively and productively rather than negatively and preventatively” (p. 81). While students exercise their autonomy by claiming the right to learn, they are still dependent on supervisors to help them develop and retain disciplined subjectivities.

The confessional
Bernauer (1987) draws attention to Foucault’s contention that Christianity is unique in the major truth obligations it imposes upon its followers for “in addition to accepting moral and dogmatic truths, they must also become excavators of their own personal truth” (p. 5). In Foucault’s own words:

Christianity requires another form of truth obligation different from faith. Each person has the duty to know who he [sic] is, that is, to try to know what is happening inside him, to acknowledge faults, to recognize temptations, to locate desires, and everyone is obliged to disclose these things either to God or to others in the community and hence to bear public or private witness against oneself. The truth obligations of faith and the self are linked together. This link permits a purification of the soul impossible without self-knowledge. (Foucault, 1988: 40)

Foucault argues that these disclosures and self knowledge are achieved through ‘confession’: that is “all those procedures by which the subject is incited to produce a discourse of truth ... which is capable of having effects on the subject himself” (Foucault, 1980c: 216). While the confessional was originally used by ecclesiastical personnel it gained more widespread use in society at large in other institutions and “a whole series of relationships: children and parents, students and educators, patients and psychiatrists, delinquents and experts” (Foucault, 1976a: 63). Thus, confessional practice branched out to pedagogy and underwent a transformation in the 18th century: “The motivations and effects it is expected to produce have varied, as have the forms it has taken: interrogations, consultations, autobiographical narratives, letters; they have been recorded, transcribed, assembled into dossiers, published, and commented on” (Foucault, 1976a: 63).
The significance of the confessional-evaluation is that “the individual becomes an object who learns to produce changes on him or herself” (Foucault, 1976a: 62; Howley & Hartnett, 1992: 281). In this respect, the practices of confession enable “individuals to effect a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and ways of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault, 1988: 18). Under the confessional “one can, with the help of expert interpreters, tell the truth about oneself” (Howley & Hartnett, 1992: 281). Crucially, Foucault (1976a) contends that the interdependence of truth and power become invisible in this process:

The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, “demands” only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of a power weighs it down, and it can finally be articulated only at the price of a kind of liberation. (p. 60)

In relation to supervision, we can say that students are expected to use their supervisors’ feedback to guide them towards self knowledge. In addition, supervisors must gather knowledge about the student to make them knowable and thus “sites of intervention” (Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997: 78). This diagnostic technique operates to reveal the nature and extent of the student’s knowledge of the canon, as well as his or her personal certainties and doubts. One widely used strategy in the humanities and social sciences is the practice of mapping intellectual change and development in a personal journal.20 As these archives are private documents, they may not be required by the supervisor. Generally, though, the student is required to provide

20 Yeatman (1995) proposes the use of supervision logbooks. Students write a summary of the supervision meeting following a structured format which is copied for the supervisor to read and retain as a record.
written evidence of their intellectual progress. On this, Hunter (1996a) suggests the importance of written evidence: “as a means of opening the student’s inner life to supervision and as a means of allowing the student to see their conduct through the normative gaze of the teacher” (p. 6). Having made this observation, he goes on to comment that:

It is crucial to this pedagogical relation - and to the relation of spiritual guidance on which it is based - that the teacher is a sympathetic figure who cares for the student and is loved by them. Only in this pastoral milieu - which joins self-examination to external supervision - can students open themselves to inspection and “freely” take on pedagogical norms as personal desires. (pp. 6-7)

The production of normative behaviours is “achieved by establishing norms for subjectivity via a proliferating microphysics of power, thus putting certain kinds of behaviour beyond the pale” (Grant, 2005b: 92). As part of this microphysics of power, the one confessing (the penitent), enters into rigorous self-analysis and an endless task of self-doubt, and the sorting out of permissible and impermissible thoughts. In supervisory relations this is dependent on the asymmetrical power/knowledge relations between student and supervisor, as well as specific techniques of listening which permit:

the master to know because of his [sic] greater experience and wisdom and therefore to give better advice. Even if the master, in his role as a discriminating power, doesn’t say anything, the fact that the thought has been expressed will have an effect of discrimination. (Foucault, 1988: 47)

This observation points to the extent to which the supervisor, even if silent, is able to regulate and shape the exchange. Common techniques in supervision are questioning, listening, and then ‘forgiving’. Supervisors are able to

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21 Forgiveness is an important tradition embedded in the confession. In the context of supervision it refers to the supervisor’s willingness to understand the student’s failure to meet their expectations. Typically, supervisors forgive delays in progress and the variable
control the exchange by deciding what to tell students or show them in the case of written comments. As Hunter (1988: 15, citing Stow, 1850: 420) explains: “The master’s duty and privilege, is to be, as it were, the filterer, purifying and directing all the answers, and leading them to the proper channel” (p. 15). While the student may sometimes be a silent auditor, the constraints of the confessional practice are weighted towards the need for the emergent scholar to talk and ‘spill the beans’ rather than listen. The outcome of students’ confession of their shortcomings is that they are made to feel good again. The forgiveness of the confessor works alongside these “admissions of transgressions [since confession is] also a ritual of atonement” (Cousins & Hussain, 1984). The corrective and validatory functions of the confessional illustrate how “positive knowledge of the self often entails the obligation to identify oneself with the figure of that knowledge” (Bernauer, 1987: 69).

In conclusion

The theoretical insights described in this chapter draw attention to what counts as knowledge, who has authority over it, and how such knowledge is to be shared and negotiated. As authority is negotiated, tensions play out in meetings where students and supervisors consciously interact and deliberate over different perspectives, where points of view are given acceptance and sanctioned while others are abandoned, or marked for reworking into more acceptable textual material. My research explores the ways research/writing pedagogies deal with uncertainties which present themselves as knowledge is created.

In the body of this thesis I explore the connection between power, knowledge and subject production in the supervisory relationship. Poststructural theories and Foucaultian discourse analysis are engaged in ways which interrelate with the questions of literacy practice, supervision pedagogy, and power relations quality of the writing, or the student’s difficulty in taking up the supervisor’s feedback and using it in the ways it was intended.
within the domain of higher education. This creates an opportunity to develop frameworks for exploring the relations between individuals, institutions and forms of knowledge and practice. I hope that my enquiry into the ways in which academic subjectivity is formed, texts are realised, university knowledges produced, and social relations negotiated will disturb some of the received notions informing current practices of knowledge-production. Poynton and Lee (2000) suggest that moving towards this possibility requires:

an account that attends to the necessary interrelatedness of theoretical, political and institutional dimensions of social/cultural phenomena and their inevitable imbrication with the methodological (p. 6).

It is to methodological matters, textual techniques, and research relations that I now turn.
Chapter 3

Matters methodological

a female professor of Psychology:
In traditional thinking, research is seen as an impersonal venture in which the combating effects of individual feeling and circumstances are scrupulously eliminated by the use of proper scientific methods. Impersonality is seen as defining the character not just of the researcher’s conduct but also of various relationships which research involves. ... And relations between students and their supervisors are also conventionally seen as needing to keep a certain distance. Though offering much goodwill, kindness and encouragement, a supervisor, in the usual academic view, must avoid too close a personal involvement with a research student or risk losing the capacity to be properly, scientifically critical.

(Salmon, 1992: 20-21)

a male professor of Education:
Written feedback is a good topic and I suspect that you will find it difficult to get supervisors to relax once they know that their feedback is a topic of observation. If I was in your sample I predict that your observation would change my practice, so you might need to provide for identification of such change. A possible benefit of participation for your supervisors would be time for reflection on the design of their feedback. Will they get a chance to observe its effects soon after it is given?

(Professor Mike Lawson, personal communication, 11/9/2004)
Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology adopted in this thesis. After outlining the reading methods I adopted for working with the texts, I give an account of the site for my research and the background of the research participants. This is followed by a detailed overview of the interview process and the forms of data analysis employed. I then attend to “the social relations that produce[d] the research itself” (Lather, 1986: 271). In particular, I reflect on the power relations obtaining between the research subjects and me in my role as the interviewer.

Reading methods

My research uses a variety of reading methods for working with the texts. In the main these fit under the broad umbrella of critical discourse studies, encompassing the emergent field of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, Graham, Lemke, & Wodak, 2004). This involves a close reading of texts and the use of a number of different techniques to engage with the layers of meaning embedded within them. The main theoretical underpinnings are influenced by the Foucaultian suppositions of writers such as Grant (2005b), Kendall and Wickham (1999), Gore (1997) and Howley and Hartnett (1992).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) - origins and accents

The emerging field of CDA has its origins in discourse analysis (DA). The latter’s linguistic legacy has meant that it typically includes detailed textual analysis and “a strong ‘technicist’ bias” (Poynton, 2000: 23). The field of DA is criticised on a number of counts, particularly its positivist view of reality and inattention to power (Poynton, 2000: 32-33). Gunther Kress (1990) explains
that CDA has “the larger political aim of putting the forms of texts, the processes of production of texts, and the process of reading, together with the structures of power that have given rise to them, into crisis” (p. 85).

In contrast to DA’s preoccupation with uniform objects of inquiry and disciplinary homogeneity, CDA is marked by “heterogeneity of methodological and theoretical approaches” (Wodak, 2001: 2). Ruth Wodak argues that the distinctive features of CDA are that it is broadly rather than just textually focused. This broader focus affords a “fully ‘critical’ account of discourse [that] requires a theorization and description of both the social processes and structures which give rise to the production of a text” (Wodak, 2001: 2-3), as well as attention to the creation of meanings which individuals instantiate through their interaction with texts.

According to Wodak (2001), three indispensable concepts figure in all CDA approaches: “the concept of power, the concept of history, and the concept of ideology” (emphasis in original, p. 3). I concentrate on the first two concepts, as will be explained more fully below. The latter concept is not taken up in this thesis since the notions of ideology as masking reality or imposing a false self, conflict with a Foucaultian perspective (1994c). Instead, I follow Foucault’s idea of discourse with its focus on the role of knowledges “as useful and necessary to the exercise of power because they were practically serviceable, not because they were false” (Gordon, 1994: xvi).

**Foucaultian CDA**

Foucaultian CDA is described in Fairclough and Wodak (1996, cited in Pennycook, 2001) as one of eight different approaches to CDA. It is distinct from formal and empirical approaches to discourse because it can be construed as a ‘critical’ approach in the sense that “it describes how social...”

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22 Contemporary debates focus on the amount of textual analysis which is appropriate for the work to be deemed discourse analysis. Fairclough (1995) advocates the “analysis of the *texture* of texts, their form and organization, and not just commentaries on the ‘content’ of texts which ignore texture” (emphasis in original, p. 4).
scientific and other disciplinary discourses repress more marginal, less dominant, forms of knowledge” (McHoul, 1990: 946). One of my fundamental assumptions is that in supervisor-student interactions certain discourses are recognised and called on to facilitate certain interpretations and sense-making while others are silenced and marginalised to serve particular interests and understandings of supervision. In pursuing this agenda, the kinds of questions I ask about feedback relations explore how supervisory knowledges are perceived and meanings are made and enacted by the institution, by the students and supervisors themselves, and by the examiners to interpret the discursive implications of these ‘knowings’.

Cate Poynton (2000) supports the need for analyst-researchers to engage with social theories that address how broad social change can be effected. She comments that the:

most effective discourse analysis ... involves ... [making] strategic selections of analytic focus, informed by other kinds of understandings of text, context and their possible relations. The best critical discourse analysis work is characterised by an economy, even parsimony, of analytical technology informing (and informed by) wide familiarity with contemporary critical theory. (pp. 36-37)

The combined goals of simplicity, through a low level of technicality, and engagement with current social theories are adopted in my readings of the interview data.

The version of Foucaultian CDA I use in analysing/interpreting my data embodies four concepts: discourse, power/knowledge, doubt/uncertainty, and truth. Each of these concepts is briefly explained below.

In relation to discourse, my analysis endeavours to show how discursive practices are linked to social relations of power (Kress, 1990: 85), for “it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together” (Foucault, 1976a:
I understand discourses as multilayered, producing different and specific structures of meanings, categories, beliefs and subjectivities.

While discourses enable both student and supervisor to “speak as themselves” (Grant, 2003: 61); they also mean that thinking, writing, and speaking occurs within culturally standardised and historical limits (Foucault, 1984b). In identifying the different discourses ordering relationships and governing the different formations of meaning I hope to show how some meanings become dominant and others marginal. Here my analytical focus includes the written texts, and the supervisor’s and student’s spoken accounts of their feedback and ways of interacting. I critically analyse these utterances to identify how the translations proceed and how the supervisor’s authority constructs a particular ordering of relations. In each respect, I explore the “work done by ‘language’ in constituting (and not just ‘expressing’) knowledges and persons” (Poynton & Lee, 2000: 36).

The view of discourses as constituting language and persons also involves appreciation of “the necessary bidirectionality of the constitutive relation between text and context” (Poynton, 2000: 32). Discourses are not closed systems, and those subject to particular discursive formations may disrupt their sequence or make innovations within them. Following this, my analysis traces the way the discursive relations between student and supervisor are “put at risk by what happens in actual interactions” (Fairclough, 2001: 124).

As far as power/knowledge are concerned, my analysis focuses on how power relations are established, maintained and resisted in supervision. Following Fairclough (1995), the version of CDA I use aims to:

systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power. (p. 132)
CDA is concerned with “the ways in which linguistic forms are used in various expressions and manipulations of power” (Wodak, 2001: 11). In line with this my focus on linguistic and discursive features is intended to unearth the specific knowledges that are constrained and permitted and how they, in their turn, produce and sustain particular power relations. Here I am interested in using the data to draw out students’ patterns of acceptance, compliance, and resistance, supervisors’ responses, and so on. My main interest is in the meanings invested in feedback and the underlying mechanisms and devices by which such meanings are induced and subjects are ‘marked’ to have different kinds of capacities.

My exploration of the discursive patterns producing particular student-supervisor power relations is underpinned by the assumption that any given thesis is both a singular event, embedded in a set of particular relations, and a product of the more general discursive structures governing knowledge production (Poynton & Lee, 2000: 6). This follows Wodak (2001) who notes that CDA considers “that it is very rare for a text to be the work of any one person” (p. 11). Through mapping this intertextuality I show how the situatedness of any particular set of relations is always/already constructed by disciplinary knowledges which take on a stable and independent existence.

Nevertheless, the student-supervisor-thesis relation is not something that can be readily ascertained or predicted by the researcher. Instead as Patterson (1997) emphasises, under CDA there is a “requirement to doubt”:

> even to doubt the existence of the category true; but most significantly a requirement on the part of the critic/analyst to take up a position of doubt vis-à-vis the target of scrutiny (the objects, fields or ideas), and to reflect that doubt through the person of the researcher. (p. 425)

In this way, CDA sidesteps any deterministic relation between texts and the social. Following this, I don’t assume that “overarching meanings” are
available (Kendall & Wickham, 1999: 150), but instead, I follow Threadgold’s (2000), suggestion that:

we should not ‘burrow’ into discourse looking for meanings. We should instead look for the external conditions of its existence, its appearance and its regularity. We should explore the condition of its possibility. Just how is it possible to know that, to think that, to say that - these are the questions we should be asking. (p. 49)

With these limitations, this research constitutes a series of ‘micro-narratives’ by reporting on local and specific knowledge ‘micro-practices’, as opposed to any ‘meta-narrative’. As my analysis will indicate, it is possible to portray these localised meanings because the institutionalised practices that guide and bound, invite certain responses and produce regularities of meaning in the interactions between student, supervisor, examiner and text.

This brings us finally to the question of ‘truth’. Here the benefits of Foucault’s approach are that it overcomes the limitations of traditional discourse analysis which considers that language is transparently representative of meaning and that linguistic analysis will “reveal a ‘better’ truth” (Poynton & Lee, 2000: 15). In contrast to this, my reconstructions of the interview data “reflect the constructedness and contingency of truths produced through analysis” (Cook, 2000: 11). The interviewees’ responses are not viewed as neutral self-representations, but as partial views which are re-presented in this account. Since “there is no neutral research” (Lather, 1986: 257), I speculate on the responses by drawing inferences from the analysis.

The accounts presented in this thesis are thus partial interpretations or fragments of accounts of practice and social relations which have attained a certain fixity through being made to settle here. There is so much more to a given supervision than any account in this thesis can offer. As Britzman (1998) says “[t]here is always more to the story” (p. 14). Supervision exceeds any

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23 The discourse of transparency, Turner (1999a; 1999b) argues, is how language has been culturally constructed.
neat summation. This thesis, then, is an assemblage of textual constructions conforming to my understandings of specific rules of proof which are “bound to issues of personal meaning, history, and power” (Barone, 1995: 65).

Choice of background documents, site and research subjects

In the following discussion I describe the choices I made in relation to the background documents, the study site, the participants, the interviews and the methods of analysis.

Background documents

As an important source of background, I drew on a number of institutional documents such as the guidelines specifying supervisor and student responsibilities, the regulations overseeing candidature (particularly those pertaining to the negotiation of supervisory feedback). These were used as sources from which to explore the political/discursive domain within which student-supervisor relations are enacted. In passing, I also drew from the growing number of ‘how to do it’ texts on research/writing and doctoral studies, as well as the reference books on supervision. These were used to assist in interpreting key themes that emerged as significant in the data.

The documents I thus consulted include:

- Sinclair, Mark. (2004). The pedagogy of ‘good’ PhD supervision: A national cross-disciplinary investigation of PhD supervision.
Site selection

Because the idea for the study arose during the time when I was working as a student learning advisor, I chose my work place as the site at which to conduct the research. I decided to research in a single Division - Social Sciences, Humanities, and Education (SSHE) which is actually multi-disciplinary\(^{24}\) in order to do an in-depth investigation of a cluster of disciplinary fields to capture a range of pedagogic practices. Hence, this research does not engage with supervision practices in the physical and biological sciences and this eludes the question of how they may or may not differ.\(^{25}\)

While the social sciences and humanities may reflect particular feedback values they are also governed by general institutional patterns relevant to all disciplines. Institutional expectations for what ‘counts’ as a PhD (original contribution to the field, critical engagement with relevant literature, competence in argument, presentation, etc.) are shared across all disciplines and reflected, for example, in the instructions sent out to examiners.

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\(^{24}\) The structure of SSHE at the time of conducting the interviews included traditional Arts disciplinary fields such as Law, Women’s Studies, Sociology, Education, Media Communication & Culture, Politics and International Studies, Social Inquiry, Asian Studies, Business, and quasi-scientific disciplines such as Psychology, Information Technology, Institute for Science & Technology Policy.

\(^{25}\) Some of the literature on disciplinary differences tends to harden the binaries. For example, the recent Sinclair report (2004) illustrates stereotypes of Science supervision as good/communitarian/supportive and Arts supervision as bad/individualist/neglectful.
Locating the study participants

Once I chose the disciplinary field I was able to start locating potential study participants. Given my interest in understanding how power relations are both productive and limiting in drawing out the potential of the student, I wished to talk directly to students about their experiences of candidature and supervisors about their pedagogic practices. The former seemed particularly important because there has been a long tradition of excluding student voices from analyses of pedagogy (Pratt, 1987) and more particularly graduate student perspectives on supervision (Stanley, 2004). Moreover, the interdependence of students and supervisors is a key focus of this research.26

In all, the sample involved 14 participants (seven doctoral students, seven supervisors), drawn respectively from Psychology, Education, Politics and International Studies, Women’s Studies, and History. The sample includes ten females and four males, further details of whom appear in the tables 1 to 3 below (pp. 56-57). The process whereby I located the participants and gained their consent to be part of this study is described below.

In July 2000 I attended an executive meeting with the Murdoch University Postgraduate Student Association (MUPSA) to inform them of my study and to solicit ideas about locating student participants. I had previously corresponded with them when I was writing my research proposal to identify areas of concern. The committee members endorsed my proposal to try the graduate student email bulletin in SSHE.

To this end, I posted an initial email (Appendix 1) on 13th August 2000 through the SSHE graduate student bulletin asking for middle-stages PhD students. This produced three respondents. However, only one of the students matched the criteria of being in the middle stages of doctoral candidature. The student who was suitable was not known to me and neither was her supervisor. Following the student’s acceptance, I contacted her supervisor

26 Bill Green (2005) and others have commented that a dyadic focus alone excludes other important influences on candidature. To address this I have explained above the breadth and depth of the coverage of supervisory contexts in this thesis.
who agreed to participate (Appendix 2). As only two participants were thus found through this method, I proceeded to contingency plan B.

This involved drawing up a list and approaching ten supervisors in SSHE via individual email invitations (4/10/00). This approach helped me locate three additional supervisors (5/10/00). Following this, I re-posted the email invitation to those supervisors who had not responded initially. This prompted acceptances from two additional possible participants (6/10/00). However, as one supervisor who agreed to participate became ill, I sent another email on 8/12/00 to six supervisors and was able to locate a replacement for case study 6 on 31/12/00. Once the supervisor agreed and nominated a student, I wrote to the student to establish their willingness to participate (Appendix 3). The seventh case study was to be an international student who was interested in joining the study. However, the student rang me and explained that they were in conflict over the student’s proposal to increase the frequency of meetings and it would not be appropriate to invite the supervisor. Following the attrition of this pair, I decided (March 2001) to extend the cohort by contacting the student with whom I had done the pilot interview some months earlier. Following the pilot student’s acceptance, I contacted her supervisor in April 2001 and she agreed to participate.

Finally, I had located my 14 participants. I knew (a little) all the five supervisors who had joined the study from the directed email approach and I knew the pilot student’s supervisor as well through union meetings, supervisor training seminars, lectures, etc. I knew two of the student participants. One had attended graduate student workshops I ran and the other student had been in a peer writing group for junior academic women and had become a good friend. This had the advantage of putting the research subjects at ease and I found the interviewees relaxed. In the case of those I did not previously know, I found that they also appeared at ease. However, I can not be sure how the social relations of the interview were experienced by the different participants.
Demographic details of research participants

Details of the postgraduates’ gender, age, ethnicity, enrolment mode, scholarship status, and mode of supervision are shown in Table 1. It represents a group of five women and two men, aged between their late twenties and their early fifties, and of predominantly Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, with one student from a European background and one from a European and Chinese background. Three students were part-time and the rest full-time, with most combining mixed modes of on and off campus study at different periods of candidature. Five students were on scholarships and three were co-supervised. Six were enrolled in traditional doctorates and one student was enrolled in a professional doctorate. All students were first generation university students.

Table 1 Demographic information on graduate research students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>pair</th>
<th>gender</th>
<th>age (at time of last interview)</th>
<th>ethnicity</th>
<th>enrolment mode</th>
<th>scholarship</th>
<th>co-supervised</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>27 (2002)</td>
<td>Asian/European</td>
<td>f/t off/on campus</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>28 (2002)</td>
<td>European/Anglo-Celtic</td>
<td>f/t off/on campus</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40-45 (2002)</td>
<td>Anglo-Celtic</td>
<td>f/t on campus</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40 (2002)</td>
<td>Anglo-Celtic</td>
<td>p/t off campus</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>49 (2005)</td>
<td>Anglo-Celtic</td>
<td>p/t off* campus</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>43 (2002)</td>
<td>Anglo-Celtic</td>
<td>f/t off campus</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>54 (2004)</td>
<td>Anglo-Celtic</td>
<td>p/t off campus</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This student was full-time during her scholarship.

Details of the supervisors’ gender, age, ethnicity, number of years of supervision, approximate number of doctoral students supervised, are shown in Table 2. In the supervisor group there were five women supervisors and two men aged between 42 and 62 years. All seven supervisors were first language

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27 For the Doctor of Education (EdD) the requirements are a minor thesis (maximum length is 100,000 words) and coursework. The thesis length is the same as for a full research thesis.
28 To protect the anonymity of the participants, the case study numbers below (1-7) do not correspond with the coding numbers used in the textual excerpts.
speakers of English from Anglo-Celtic, Anglo-American and European backgrounds. Their experiences in supervising graduate students ranged between seven years to 25 years.

Table 2 Demographic information on supervisors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>case study pair</th>
<th>gender</th>
<th>age (at time of last interview)</th>
<th>ethnicity</th>
<th>years of supervising (at time of last interview)</th>
<th>doctoral students supervised to completion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>44 (2002)</td>
<td>Anglo-Celtic</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>58 (2002)</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>42 (2002)</td>
<td>Anglo-Celtic</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>&lt;10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>50 (2005)</td>
<td>Anglo-Celtic</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 below shows the supervisor/student pairs, their gender, age, and the thesis result, except for Student 5 who has not yet submitted.

Table 3 Supervisor/student pairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>pair</th>
<th>supervisor</th>
<th>student</th>
<th>thesis result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>female early 40s</td>
<td>female late 20s</td>
<td>pass with major amendments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>female late 50s</td>
<td>female late 20s</td>
<td>pass with minor amendments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>male early 40s</td>
<td>female early 40s</td>
<td>pass with major amendments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>male late 50s</td>
<td>male early 40s</td>
<td>pass with minor amendments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>female early 50s</td>
<td>female late 40s</td>
<td>yet to submit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>female early 60s</td>
<td>male early 40s</td>
<td>pass outright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>female late 50s</td>
<td>female early 50s</td>
<td>pass with minor amendments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Six of the seven students had done previous work with their current supervisors - either honours, independent study contracts, a postgraduate
diploma, or a master’s degree - and one was a close colleague of their current supervisor. Both students and supervisors highlighted how the relations they had previously established were important for the effectiveness of their current supervision relations.

The composition of the sample bears significantly on the findings presented in this research. Five supervisor participants responded to a direct approach, and hence they volunteered and then nominated the student participant. The self-selection of the supervisor participants means the study is likely to provide a ‘favourable’ image of student-supervisor interaction given that supervisors whose supervision is unsatisfactory and whose methods are unsound are unlikely to agree to participate or invite their students. In the student group, each participant conveyed their positive experiences of supervision, and the valuable feedback on their work they were receiving. It is therefore important to emphasise the internal similarity of the sample with respect to harmonious student-supervisor relations and productive transactions of feedback. Overall, the sample is representative of a group of supervisors and students who were satisfied with their supervision arrangements. This suggests that the analysis and conclusions provided in this thesis might convey a decidedly positive view of supervision practices and candidature which would not hold across the board.

However, in saying that students and supervisors experienced supervision favourably I do not wish to overstate these unifying tendencies, nor do I wish to treat them as homogenous groups. To do so would suppress the competing and contradictory responses provided in the interviews which indicated that despite their positive relations, supervision and candidature were not without discomfort.

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29 While the majority of graduate students gain access to higher degrees through undergraduate studies and their contact with lecturers and many know their supervisors beforehand, many international students, and local students new to the campus do not have contact with their supervisors prior to enrolment.

30 Case study 1 was the student who responded to the first email and invited her supervisor and case study 7 was the pilot student.
Research instruments

My data set comprises three types of oral and written material derived from the students and supervisors (outlined in detail in the respective sections below). These are:

1. A feedback-practices questionnaire, which was emailed before the supervisory meeting and returned before the second interview.

2. Three audio-taped rounds of separate interviews (42 in total) with each supervisor and graduate student and myself lasting approximately an hour for each one. Interviews were conducted from the student’s middle stages of PhD candidature and subjects were interviewed in three phases up to the end stages:

   • the first interview was conducted at the student’s middle stage of candidature;
   • the second was conducted at the middle-end stages of candidature and focused on a recent supervisory meeting in which feedback on a piece of work had been provided and discussed;
   • the third interview was conducted at the end stages of candidature.

3. Seven written samples of each student’s draft thesis chapter with his/her supervisor’s written feedback collected at the end of the second interview.

The questionnaire

Prior to the second interview and shortly before a supervisory meeting was planned to discuss work, I asked each supervisor and student to complete a feedback-practices questionnaire via email. The main reason for this was that I felt it was important to include material to supplement the interview responses. The questionnaire (shown in Appendix 4), was designed to capture perspectives from both supervisors and students regarding the written work
that was then in preparation. In particular, I was interested in the kinds of feedback being given, how draft chapters were read, and the ways revisions were negotiated. The questionnaire was designed as a quick survey of information and practices, not a deep, reflective questionnaire. Questions to students elicited their expectations of feedback and how these were communicated to the supervisor, as well as their perceptions of the written work they were about to submit (its strengths and any particular difficulties/concerns they had). Questions to supervisors asked whether the nature of the feedback the student wanted had been discussed, the supervisor’s technique of working with the student’s draft, what they were concerned to address and the factors which affected their comments on the piece of writing, as well as the supervisor’s expectations regarding the student’s use of the comments provided.

**Interviews**

As indicated above, students were selected in the middle stages of PhD candidature and were interviewed in three phases up to the end stages. My reason for choosing the middle stages of candidature was to allow participants to draw from several experiences of feedback they had been given on their writing. In addition, I felt that they were likely to have established a working and writing pattern and be past the establishment phase of their supervision and be able to reflect back on their preliminary experiences. I decided not to commence the research with students at the end stages as the intrusion might have proved detrimental to their study given the pressures of the final writing period. While I did conduct the last interview during the end stages, by then we had established a rapport and the students were familiar with the interview format. My approach to the timing and data gathering I believe has allowed for all stages of candidature to be represented. Despite not conducting any early stages interviews, the beginning stages are reasonably well covered in the responses from students and supervisors. The supervisor responses often differentiated how they approached supervision in the beginning, middle, and end stages.
Open-ended and semi-structured interviews with students and supervisors form the prime data source of this research. Participants were asked to commit to three interviews conducted over a period of five years following the student’s rate of progress through the middle to end stages. The majority of the interviews were done over a three-year period with the longest gap being five years for a part-time candidate who was delayed. The mostly hour-long interviews were all conducted separately and were confidential. They were intended to be self-reflective for the participants. One important consideration was that I did not take the role of a go-between.

My rationale for collecting this data in three stages is that I wanted to capture the dynamic context of student-supervisor relations. Previous studies of feedback have been criticised (Anson, 1989) because they do not take account of the social context of the working relationship, so the supervisor’s comments may be labelled as strictly mechanical, unhelpful and confusing without considering the context of their changing relations in which the feedback was transacted.

Most studies seem to capture a single, fleeting moment of exchange and use this to draw conclusions about social relations without accounting for the states of change in which subjects are engaged. Hence, rather than understanding moments of challenge or tension as ‘frozen’ moments, I hoped to illuminate their productive, and disruptive, implications in supervision.

Informed consent

The participants’ informed consent was sought after they had been advised of the nature of the research and its procedures. They were briefed about the right to privacy and the means by which their identities would be protected. Confidentiality was respected at all times. I collected the consent form at the time of the first interview. Participants were advised in this letter and during each interview they could withdraw their consent at any time. It should be noted that five of the supervisors invited their students to participate. While it is possible that the power relations between students made it difficult for
these students to decline, I did not get the feeling that any of the student participants were reluctant about their involvement, and each student said they had valued being part of the study, flagging the opportunity to reflect on the process as particularly valuable.

**Round 1 interviews (October 2000 to January 2001)**
The first round of interviews was conducted between October 2000 and January 2001 according to availability, with each participant interviewed separately as for all the interviews. In this first contact, I focused on establishing trust and building rapport as this would be critical to ensure a fruitful long-term relationship (Janesick, 2000; Lather, 1991). The discussion was reasonably open-ended with broad questions in which participants were invited to ‘tell their stories’ (see Appendix 5). Some of the questions were retrospective, and some were present and future oriented. I asked students to reflect on the early stages of supervision (adjustment to being a graduate student; observations on the changing nature of feedback; development of the research proposal; feedback which does/doesn’t work; and expectations of supervision). Supervisors were asked to describe their overall approach to giving feedback and their ideas about the effectiveness of feedback at different stages of writing, as well as their expectations regarding their students’ use of their feedback. Both groups were asked what they foresaw would be the biggest challenge in their supervision with the participant, and what they hoped to gain from being involved in this research.

**Round 2 interviews (May 2001 to November 2002)**
The second round of interviews was conducted between May 2001 and November 2002 while students were in the middle/end stages of candidature. I interviewed each student either straight or soon after a supervisory meeting, with the maximum period being three weeks after the supervisory meeting. The focus was on the situated practices of giving and receiving feedback as this second round of interviews was planned around a specific meeting and feedback transaction. The questions addressed two main areas: the feedback on the written work and the meeting in which they were discussed (see Appendix 6). Students were asked whether they had received the kind of
feedback they stated they were looking for in the feedback practices questionnaire (discussed above). They were asked to reflect on the nature of the comments provided during the meeting (and on the written work they discussed) in terms of what was the most/least helpful feedback received; their plans with respect to comments; and their supervisor’s expectations of the use of the feedback provided. At the end of the interview, I collected the draft they had discussed, with the supervisor’s written comments on it.

The questions for supervisors followed the same format. I asked whether the supervisor was satisfied with the meeting and whether the student was receptive to their feedback and how they gauged this. Questions also addressed the contributions they least liked to make, how the supervisor clarified their writing values/preferences, and how the supervisor had acquired knowledge of developing writing abilities.

**Round 3 interviews (May 2002 to October 2005)**

The third round of interviews was conducted during the student’s end stages of candidature. Most of the interviews were done between May 2002 and February 2004, with the exception of one candidate who had experienced delays and the interviews with this supervisor and student were done in September and October 2005.

For this third interview the questions explored the feedback transacted in the end stages of candidature (see Appendix 7). I asked six follow-up questions to the student group and five to the supervisor group to fill in certain gaps left from the previous interviews. Several questions picked up on problematic supervisory practices which had surfaced in previous interviews. In this way, I was getting the participants to negotiate meanings and shape the emergent analysis.31 Both groups were asked how they challenged the power frameworks which implied particular subject positions for their respective roles as student and supervisor. I asked students about suggestions they would give to a new student about working with a supervisor’s feedback, while

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31 I also used one of the supervisor’s comments about oral and written feedback from the first interview and a panel member’s reflection on the process of giving feedback.
supervisors were asked for their suggestions to a novice supervisor about giving and negotiating feedback. Specific questions addressed changes students had undergone and the way the feedback had changed in the end stages. Two questions sought comments on supervisors’ aspirations for their students as practising scholars. For the final question I revisited the question posed in the first interview about what (if anything) they had gained from being involved in my research.32

Interview location and documentation processes
The majority 38 of the 42 interviews for the research were conducted at Murdoch University in staff offices while four were conducted in my home. The interviews were relaxed and friendly. The shortest lasted 20 minutes and the longest one hour and 30 minutes. During each interview, I reiterated the confidential nature of the responses and the guaranteed anonymity, as well as the invitation for interviewees to check transcripts and thesis drafts. While tape recording the interviews I took handwritten notes.

After each interview, I transcribed most of the interviews myself, with some typing assistance provided. A copy of the transcript was sent to each interviewee for confirmation, comment or correction, allowing them a month to respond. As part of the general protocol in protecting confidentiality the transcripts were only included in the case record in a form agreed by the interviewee, and with a pseudonym. This ensured that any identifying features were removed. With respect to what is reported, extreme care was taken to protect each participant’s right to privacy. This was done through consultation with the participants who determined what was retained or removed from the transcripts. Most comments I received in subsequent interviews were remonstrances about how inarticulate the interviewee thought they sounded because they were given verbatim transcripts.

32 In closing the interview some reading material (listed in Appendix 7) on supervision/candidature was given to each participant.
Written samples

The samples of each student’s draft thesis chapter with the supervisor’s feedback on it were collected at the end of the second interview. The comments provide valuable data about student and supervisor perceptions of feedback practices; however, these proved less expedient in this research than the interview texts. This was mainly due to time constraints plus the fact the interviews proved to be so rich, and the analysis very time-consuming.

A note on transcript analysis - bracketing and coding

In addition to the critical discourse modes of analysis, I used the five bracketing steps advocated by Denzin ((1989) cited in Janesick, 2000: 390) “which is to hold the phenomenon up for serious inspection”. Each response was bracketed in a table and a coding system was developed as I worked with individual questions. My method of reading the transcripts was relatively straightforward as it involved re-reading the sentence fragments. For certain key questions, I paraphrased the responses in a column beside the original text and coded each sentence according to certain key features in a central column separating the original and paraphrased comments. I then re-worked the paraphrases into a mini-summary for each respondent so I could get an overview at a glance and look across the sample to compare and contrast responses. For certain key questions I wrote a detailed summary paper which incorporated the five bracketing steps. Each summary categorised and grouped the data according to Jennifer Gore’s (1995a; 1995b; 1997) taxonomy (outlined in the following chapter). All selections from transcripts have been

33 The five steps are: “1. Locate within the personal experience, or self-story, key phrases and statements that speak directly to the phenomenon in question. 2. Interpret the meanings of these phrases as an informed reader. 3. Obtain the participants’ interpretation of these findings, if possible. 4. Inspect these meanings for what they reveal about the essential, recurring features of the phenomenon being studied. 5. Offer a tentative statement or definition of the phenomenon in terms of the essential recurring features identified in Step 4.” (p. 390)
Research(ing) relations

Researcher subjectivity, ethical concerns, power relations in the interview

... any mode of discourse analysis which does not recognise its own political and institutional location fails to take into account its own status as discourse ... [I]t is the responsibility of any discourse analysis to make its own assumptions, positions and methodological templates as explicit as possible, to attempt to know its own history and its relation to the social conditions of possibility in which it is assembled. (McHoul & Luke, 1989: 327)

Lee (2000) criticises much discourse analytical work on the grounds that most analysts refrain from “account[ing] reflexively for the textuality of their own texts” (p. 202). In this final section, I attempt to do just this in providing my reflections on the research process and my ethical concerns. I also address power relations, particularly the ways they impacted on the collection and analysis of the interview data. I thus address the ways the objects of analysis were constructed through the particular knowledge practices I attributed as the analyst/author to the texts or ‘objects’ of analysis.

I have already given some of my personal history in the Introduction to this thesis. These biographical details have shaped the meanings recorded in this thesis - in the way it is written, the data is analysed and the findings reported; in essence mine was an ‘insider’ perspective. This was deepened and amplified by the fact that my own identity formation was being produced as a scholar and I was thus immersed in the very cultural patterns of the topics under investigation.
Many ethical considerations surfaced over the course of this research. Above all, an ethical response to the study participants included being mindful that the student’s work was in progress and I did not want to inflame any delicate supervisory issues arising in interviews. The moral obligation to do no harm to the research participants and consider the social consequences of my research was paramount. Most fundamentally, I did not wish to contribute to any supervision difficulties, so I was careful about the questions I asked. Observing anonymity was especially important. To my knowledge no disruptions have occurred as a result of the study.

The Human Research and Ethics Committee approved this research (Permit no: 2000/216). The committee had one main query regarding how I would deal with any delicate matters students might raise with regards to student-supervisor relations. I responded by saying that if problems occurred I would refer students to relevant university staff to defuse these issues. This was accepted and the project was given unconditional approval on 10th August 2000.

In exercising choices about what to include in this thesis I have been concerned for the vulnerability of the participants through having their experiences publicly documented. Despite their hidden identities, given the smallness of the institution, there could always be fears that participants could be recognised (or that pairs might recognise each other). I thus needed to protect the participants from any adverse effects such as any “risk [of] exposure and embarrassment, as well as loss of standing, employment, and self-esteem” (Stake, 2000: 447). Because of this, I agreed to cut material that any supervisor or student felt anxious about (and thus did so on two occasions at the request of students). Due to the individualised nature of my research, which “share[d] an intense interest in personal views and circumstances” (Stake, 2000: 447), I was asking the research participants to reflect on experiences which are contingent on intimate and intersubjective processes obtained through self-disclosure.
In the interviews I chose to deflect attention away from the individual student-supervisor relations, so as not to encourage personal and interpersonal judgements. However, supervisors did respond with the student participant in mind, as well as at times talking about students they had supervised over the years. One supervisor offered to tape record a supervision session but I elected not to do this because I did not want to alter the student and supervisor’s experiences of candidature any more than my ‘probing’ questions were already doing.

One final point is that the power I carry as researcher extends beyond the interview and transcription protocols. I also had editorial discretion in terms of deciding what to include in my thesis chapters and choosing how to render the accounts of their experiences. It is with this in mind that I turn to the social relations of the interview performance.

Power relations in the research interview genre

As the interview conversations unfolded power relations were at work. One way they worked was through the subtle control of the dialogue flow in terms of who asked and who responded. As far as the supervisors were concerned, they sometimes talked at length and often went over the allotted time. Supervisors were candid in the interviews and some expressed their disappointment in their own abilities. At times they were guarded when they criticised students or colleagues. Sometimes they confided information as they described an incident, usually about a student-supervisor misunderstanding, or their judgements of other colleagues who they felt exploited students. Through their responses and their volunteering, their occasional questions to me, and the additional points they raised when the interview ended, they performed as models of “how to handle oneself in the matter of one’s own claims to position” (Goffman, 1981: 192).

Foucault (1980a) argues that the control or “the agency of domination” resides with the listener (predominantly me as the interviewer) “in the one who questions and is not supposed to know” (p. 62). To an extent this
presupposes that the silent auditor is in control and able to control the exchange. Against this, the supervisors were all senior in status to me (a student, but most knew me as a former junior colleague) and most have many years of experience in supervision. They exercised power through their particular institutional status and topic expertise, as well as other positionings.

With respect to the students a slightly different power dynamic operated. We were all students (although I was a colleague to one and teacher of another) and I was seeking information about particular topics. The conversations had an informal conversational tone. In relation to this, Rhydwen (1996) contends that “if an interview shares the characteristics of a conversation in which power is evenly distributed, in which the participants claim to experience feelings of intimacy, then it can be claimed that the interview itself can be a site of intimacy and solidarity” (p. 323). However, any sense of solidarity promoted by our equal status as students was undercut by my position as researcher, as the one who asked the questions and who talked to their supervisor. Having said that, the student participant also selected how they responded, inviting me to see them as a certain kind of persona, with their reconstruction playing “an important part in the construction of self and identity” (Lee & Williams, 1999: 10).

Another observation is that even when relations are more equal between speaker and listener (in my capacity as student) the power relations of the interview produce techniques of listening in which a research subject’s position may be underpinned by a degree of dependency. I think this stems from the desire to discern what the interviewer wants. Underlying this, there is a dynamic wherein each party is unaware of the ways the interview is framed by how each interprets and authorises the other as the source of hopes and desires, unease and fears (Simon, 1995).
**Summary of arguments**

In brief, I aim to make visible the nexus between properties of texts and social relations in supervision. Principally, I have chosen to adopt a non-linguistic conception of discourse - one which favours discursive textual analysis and understands that language does not provide “a one way situation-to-language conception” (Poynton & Lee, 2000: 4). A core supposition of the postlinguistic approach is that “texts are instantiations of socially regulated discourses and that the processes of production and reception are socially constrained” (Janks, 1997: 329). Thus, the meanings which can be spoken at any moment are subject to constraints of time and place such that those who produce texts are not the authors of meanings that we may think them to be. Postlinguistic analysis provides a means of “captur[ing] regularities of meaning used by those positioned as members of particular institutions, regularities which serve both to make sense of, but also to continuously effect, such positionings” (Poynton & Lee, 2000: 6).

My analysis also assumes that student-supervisor relations are produced within, and mediated by, political, social, and local, contingent factors. These produce contradictory, multifaceted and fractured domains of meaning relating to intellectual work. I also suggest that as embodied, thinking and feeling beings, student subjects are not merely inscribed by their supervisors’ discourses. They are active participants, albeit constrained ones, in the partial shaping of the outcomes that arise.

In sum, my analysis engages the interconnected strands of language, discourse, subjectivity, power and pedagogy. The stance towards the analysis of the texts involves abandoning the idea of objective reality and working instead to construct a view in which uncertainty, anomaly, and inconsistency are always/already prevalent. In using a ‘worm’s-eye view’ (Blacker, 1998: 356) methodology I seek to provide a close-up picture of feedback relations. Such a view is possible if the researcher gets down low and fumbles, even stumbles, along in the dark through some taken-for-granted assumptions.
about supervision while being attentive to the micro-level functionings of power in supervision and the tentative nature of interpretive work.

There is, in other words, an attempt to work with - and not against - a kind of ‘darkness’ which allows me to denote the uncertainty, ambiguity, tentativeness which underlies the textual data. It also denotes the way I take various snapshots of pedagogy to capture a view from below - a meek or lowly outlook. It is a humble position which acknowledges the limitations of scale (Lemke, 1995: 100), and the limits of knowing (Spivak, 1993). For Foucault (1976a) power is located in the small places. While not burrowing for hidden meanings, a tunneling technique is used to dig it up to analyse the productivities of texts to reveal the strategies and techniques supervisors use via their feedback to restrict and prescribe the range of possible interpretations of their feedback. Moreover, in order to identify specific capacities that students acquire in establishing their academic subjectivities I will explore the techniques of self-management that they use and the specific ways of behaving as student and certain ways of thinking about knowledge which become normalised while “other ways remain hidden-impossible and inconceivable” (Wright, 2000: 169).

I turn now to the five data chapters which enact the specific effects and patterns coexisting in various scenes of supervision.
Chapter 4

Under pressure: Getting them writing and keeping them writing

a female postgraduate student:
I wish I’d had more time. It’s as simple as that. I mean I rarely see my supervisors every week and when you do they’re always pressed for time. They don’t have the time allocated to them to sit and discuss. I mean that’s what you need, more than anything else you need someone to bounce your ideas off and to say: “I’m really struggling with this concept”. … Yeah, it’s difficult. … But you don’t have time, you have half an hour maximum if you’re lucky and it’s not time to even get through your list of questions. So I feel very strongly about that and I even wrote on a Postgraduate Survey this year that I wished … They said: “Is there anything the university can do to help you as a Postgraduate?” And I wrote: “Look after my supervisors so they can do their job properly.” Because they just don’t have time and it’s so unfair.

(Student K, I/V3, Q21: 42)

a male supervisor:
And [finding time to be able to diagnose students’ needs] of course is going to probably have to change under the new system where we have these more routine milestones and so on. I mean that may be a good thing for individual students but I think it is going to put so much pressure on supervisors they will be confronted with supervisors having breakdowns who can’t cope with the stress. I can’t see how supervisors are going to be able to cope with the added work of meeting the milestones. If they are not given more time in their workload allocations with the students they’ve got, because obviously it’s not realistic to expect them to find the extra time that’s going to be required for this new system.

(Supervisor L, I/V1, Q3C: 54-58)
Introduction

Is it the case, as Lee & Green (2004: 12) suggest, that we live in a climate of “‘fast supervision’ and hyper-efficient candidature”? If so, what is the impact on supervisory practice? What disciplinary techniques have emerged to ‘keep’ students writing and to promote efficient writing? And which particular disciplines are the concomitants of the new pressures?

In exploring these questions, I first discuss institutional responses to the new completion ruling and examine the various strategies that seek to regulate the research/writing process in an endeavour to get students and supervisors to make the ‘right’ kinds of effort to control, order and regulate their writing. In the second part of the chapter, I draw on data from supervisors and students to suggest how these factors may play out in practice. The chapter ends with reflection on the way supervision is now ‘out of time’.

Policy watching on supervision pedagogy - who is watching whom?

A recent article by McWilliam, Singh, and Taylor (2002) argues that policy makers have reformulated supervision as an exercise in “risk management” as institutions seek to control the diverse outcomes expected of the doctorate. The new directives target the doctoral supervisor-candidate relationship and craft “new relational identities” (p. 119) for graduate students and supervisors. As the work of supervisors is revisioned as “professional expertise”, the “local, disciplinary-specific or ‘craft’ knowledge” of academics is being configured according to a “system of rules, formats and technologies for communicating within and across institutions” (p. 120). Under these conditions, the framework for supervision is reconstituted as “professional care and risk management” (p. 119).
While McWillliam et al., (2002) examine the implications for thesis examination in the new climate, and suggest that risk response strategies involve supervisors “in constant self-scrutiny” (p. 128), they do not provide details about how these new forces are reshaping the actual practices of supervision. This has been noted elsewhere. For example Grant (2005b) argues that the “Code of Practice” at her institution imposes more “stringent accountabilities” on supervisors by way of increased responsibilities as do Corcoran and Priest (1999) at the University of Adelaide. Under the new regulatory measures supervisors may be called to account for the frequency of meetings, and/or the timing and quality of their feedback and students are asked to comment on these aspects in their annual progress reports. Student satisfaction surveys are now widely used to gather quantitative and qualitative ratings of supervision, such as mentioned by Student K in the opening epigraph.

Surveillance of students’ productivity rates has increased. To get and keep students writing in this new environment involves a more public scrutiny of students. Some of the recent innovations at the site university include a review interview for scholarship students in their second year to justify their progress. Milestone targets (see Appendix 8) and follow-up documentation of their attainment are now widely used in Australasian universities. At one institution, the department was initially required to meet with the student at least twice in the candidature to review progress; now, an annual meeting is expected, at which an 18-page form has to be completed (Colebatch, 2005). Such measures may be welcomed by students who feel they allow their work to receive feedback in a public forum. Others may regard these requirements as intrusive because they diminish their sense of autonomy. With respect to autonomy, Hal Colebatch (2002) suggests that the tighter structures and controls “may be at the expense of [students] becoming self-reliant independent researchers”.

Not only does the surveillance have an impact on what kind of researchers students become, but also on the kind of research undertaken. There is some evidence to suggest that students are choosing safer topics/projects (Mitchell,
2002; Neumann, 2003). Further, Smith (2000) suggests that ‘high risk’ categories may be created to discourage or deny access to students considered to pose unacceptable risks because they “have a history of slower completions” (p. 27). Sinclair’s (2004: 20) report refers to ‘safe’ student selection practices in the natural sciences, which include deterring part-time candidates. Neumann’s (2003) study mentions that some university faculties have been “operating unofficial policies of greater selectivity in the recruitment of various categories of student for some years” (p. 118). Other anecdotal reports indicate that students who are in full-time employment are considered high risk so part-time candidature may be disallowed because of the likelihood of late completion. Some students are encouraged to suspend while the supervisor keeps supervising without a workload allocation to do so, to enable the student to submit on time.

In concert with this, there has been a move to more ‘hands on’ supervision pedagogies derived from the natural sciences. Sinclair’s (2004) recent report is one such text. This report “The Pedagogy of ‘Good’ PhD Supervision: A National Cross-Disciplinary Investigation of PhD Supervision” was commissioned by DEST. The report highlights the significant differences between the disciplinary practices in terms of the cohort supervised, the funding arrangements, the cultural values towards knowledge production, and the styles of supervision preferred. The natural sciences are held up as the exemplar upon which the social sciences, arts and humanities should model themselves to attain faster completion rates. Certain forms of supervision are thus being promoted and later we see the sorts of norms thereby established.

Colebatch (2002) disputes the claim that lengthy completions are linked to poor supervision and argues that allegations about poor supervision and lengthy completion times have not been supported by DETYA’s own research. He points out that students in DETYA/DEST documents are depicted both as “committed students and competent consumers” and as “dopes trapped by incompetent educators” (2002: 33). He also outlines the thin level of detail in

34 DETYA (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs) was renamed DEST (Department of Education, Science and Training).
the DETYA green and white papers (Department of Education, 1999a, 1999b) on completion times, citing research by Baker, Robertson and Toguchi (1996) (in fact used by DETYA) which shows that completion rates are improving and that the levels of satisfaction with supervision are high. He criticises the narrow outcome focus which has been taken and the privileging of the length of completion over other aspects of research degrees.

In contrast with these managerial concerns, the kinds of supports students and supervisors need with the writing of the thesis are barely considered. As Lee (1998) and Torrance and Thomas (1994) argue, little consideration is given to how advanced level writing can actually be ‘supervised’ and sustained. In the Sinclair Report (2004), for example, there are few comments or concrete strategies on this matter. This absence replicates the tendency to either treat writing as an abstract and mysterious process or as self-evident.

Let us now look more closely at some of the suppositions undergirding these changes.

Managing research/writing by making the right efforts

Graduate study is noted for the significant time taken to produce ‘finished’ writing. Inventiveness, inspiration, and creativity are notoriously unpunctual, just as reading and learning are interminable activities. A particular challenge for supervisors therefore is to work with delayed writing. For, as Grant (2005b) points out, insufficient progress in research/writing “is almost a norm of academic life and maybe especially the life of the graduate research student” (p. 96).

In introducing shorter time frames institutions have aimed to get the message across to students and supervisors that full-time students should complete within four and a half years and part-time students within seven years. The texts that communicate this expectation aim to establish new norms and promote practices that encourage efficient self-management. Corcoran and Priest (1999) suggest that “[e]laborate regimes of surveillance are now ‘in
These emphasise order, certainty, effort, predictability, punctuality, rationality and control as well as obedience, compliance, autonomy and motivation. Students and supervisors are expected to “hold frequent and adequate discussions” and the feedback on their written work is structured around meetings that are to be held “not less than once per month” (Research student supervision policy, 2006: 2). The “research plan, research timetable and milestones ... with appropriate time frame for the candidate’s enrolment” (Responsibilities of postgraduate research candidates, 2006: 3) are key management tools. Formalised milestones monitor students’ progress by ordering tasks to be completed by specific times and specifying that the texts are to be written to thesis quality.

Whereas previously progress markers were informally negotiated (and checked on progress reports) there was latitude for flexibility and variability. With the new milestone system graduate students need to carefully budget their time to ensure their progress in writing coincides with the attainment of the milestones. By standardising the attainment of milestones students may be pressured to complete work to thesis standard when they might be better to produce a series of chapters in a rough and incomplete form and then revise each one as the whole thesis takes shape. Accordingly, the feedback may become overly focussed on ‘product’, thus weakening the value of time as a ‘process’ of learning. An unintended effect of a greater frequency of meetings may also be a proliferation of drafts and expectations of constant feedback. These activities may tire, overwhelm or demoralise the student (and supervisor).

The expectation that supervisors and students need to “assure the quality of the time used” (Foucault, 1979: 150) is weighted more towards students than supervisors. While students are responsible for the quality of their work, it is difficult for them to assure its quality because standards for doctoral theses are not transparent. To determine if their writing attains the required standard they are reliant on supervisors to specify what is tacitly known. While the “Code of Practice” at the site institution mentions that supervisors
should provide timely feedback, the details on how much time they should invest in providing constructive feedback are left unspecified.

The milestone document at the site institution embeds the expectation that the supervisor should act as overseer through their role as the ‘verifier’ of adequate progress. This adjudicatory role is reinforced by the normative positioning of the supervisor as “the dominant figure in supervision” (Grant, 2005b: 95). The supervisor is the one “who requir [es] written work from the student” and “provid [es] written comments within a mutually agreed period” (Responsibilities of postgraduate research student supervisors, 2006: 3), whereas the student is someone who ‘submits’ and ‘responds’ (Responsibilities of postgraduate research candidates, 2006). The power disparity that makes it difficult for students to make the expected negotiation “within a mutually agreed period” is overlooked. Asking for a supervisor’s time is never a straightforward matter.

In providing feedback on students’ work, supervisors will inevitably ask students to commit time to re-reading, re-writing, and re-thinking. In subsequent chapters I will present data which suggests that feedback interactions are often fraught because of the power relations inherent in supervision. The supervisor’s feedback may cause confusion, misunderstanding, resentment or resistance. It is also filtered through the variables of personality, disposition, trust, knowledge, ethnicity, time factors, age, wellness, class, sexuality, life experiences, and so on. Moreover, the effects of the feedback may unsettle students’ confidence in their work and augment their sense of uncertainty, making them reluctant to submit further work despite the supervisor’s persistent requests. Writing proceeds incrementally and momentum is erratic and irregular for it is subject to a multitude of derailments.

Another challenge for both supervisor and student that makes supervision a troubled domain is their respective busyness. All the supervisors in this study mentioned that time has become a more pressing issue for them. The increase in student and administrative loads has meant more time is expended in other
duties and there is less time for supervision. The problem is reflected variously in the following three examples:

Well [my time pressures are] a problem too. I often have to put students off for a week or a month to be sure that I can get the time to read the material before I meet them. Another complication is … I find myself with a bigger and bigger load of examination of PhD theses from other universities. But that takes time away from what you can spend … with your own students too. So that’s a major problem. (Supervisor L, I/V1, Q3B: 48)

And it’s certainly a lot harder being an academic than it was when I first started. I could have a postgrad and we could get engrossed in something and we could talk for two or three hours and we wouldn’t think about the time. Now they’re stacked in like bloody sardines … and Jesus I’m one of the few that will still see my students for an hour … alone, rather than put em in a group and have a group supervision session, whatever that is! And obviously it’s very popular and lots of people are doing it. (Supervisor F, I/V3, Q19: 105)

I think [what I am most concerned about in my supervisory practices] apart from that, the time problem, I feel that sometimes, I should be spending more time actually thinking about people’s theses. And I think that would probably be easier if there were more full-time students whom I saw more often. But I don’t feel that I have the time, enough time, sometimes to really get into it … people would say: “Well you shouldn’t be … it’s the student’s work and everything”. But I actually find it quite hard to give any sort of useful feedback or contribute to the process if I really have no idea what the student’s data looks like, or what it entails and so on. And so, I think … I feel a better supervisor if I’ve got my hands dirty as well. To actually have looked at the stuff or perhaps tried some of the coding or done whatever. I think I feel much more competent then to give advice. (Supervisor B, I/V1, Q3B: 84)
These excerpts suggest that supervisors are under strain and must deal with many competing interests that encroach on time for reading, reflection, thoughtful conversation and feedback. The quality, depth and usefulness of the supervisor’s feedback are vital for sustaining students’ writing momentum. Impetus is lost when there are time delays in the feedback, or when students are rushed through meetings, or given trivial feedback. And, as Grant (2005b) comments, the situation is rendered the more difficult given the ‘rationing’ considerations at play: “Even when a supervisor enjoys supervision, the pressures on her/his time may mean an ambiguous - even resentful - state in relation to particular moments of it and in relation to the student who is asking for it” (p. 86). This positions the student as a “humble petitioner” (Salmon, 1992: 93).

The small amount of time supervisors have available compared with what students are expected to dedicate to the thesis may lead to misinterpretation or unspoken resentments. This is reinforced by a sense (among students) that their time is considered less important than that of their supervisors’ and that their own time constraints are discounted. On the less considered matter of student busyness, Cotterill and Waterhouse (1998) reflect that:

[Students] too expend time saving time. They approach us, if they approach us at all, with tentative overtures such as ‘I know you’re busy, but …’, ‘This won’t take long …’ etc. Their relative powerlessness in the fact of our structurally created greed for time is manifested in statements of gratitude for having ‘had’ some of ‘our time’. It is evident that the less powerful are bound to honour the more important time of those further up the educational hierarchy. There is a mythology amongst some members of staff that students’ time is not valuable [(Adam, 1995)]. Yet it is clearly the case that their lives are even more complicated than were the lives of their counterparts a decade ago. (p. 14)
Leonard, Becker and Coate (2005) argue that higher education institutions fail to acknowledge the socially-embedded nature of research students. They are, they say:

unconcerned with staff and especially students’ ‘outside’ employment and domestic work and relationships. Rather, higher education expects students to have domestic support - practical and financial; and those who bear much of the cost of, and provide support for, their father/mother, partner or friend when gaining a doctorate, are barely recognised. (emphasis in original, p. 146)

While personal matters are generally considered to be immaterial in the pedagogical arena (Jones, 1996), they can be spoken of when they encroach on students’ research/writing time, provided steps are taken to overcome them. Supervisors are expected to indicate on progress reports any delays to students’ progress, as are students. The latest addition to student progress reports at the site institution is a section in which the student is expected to divulge “any problems which have affected your progress in the past year (eg technical, personal, supervisory, lack of equipment/resources). You should outline the steps you have taken to address these problems, and any progress made since addressing these issues.” (Progress report, 2006: 2). The student section of the report is now three pages compared with two pages in 1996, and the supervisor section has also grown.

So far I have outlined the institutional moves to propel students towards timely completion. These strategies are based on the belief that writing can be managed as a technical-rational process. My suggestion is that these moves fail to capture research and supervision in its complexity. A number of complex factors make the research process difficult to regulate in practice. They include the open-ended nature of research/writing, the structural inequality between student and supervisor, and the personal and professional constraints on time.
It is against this backdrop that I now turn to the student and supervisor study participants. My focus is on the enactment and experience of a range of feedback strategies designed to move students towards faster completions. In the ensuing analysis, I take care to distinguish between ‘normal’ time pressures and the new régime practices that deepen and mediate these. Much of what follows exposes the gap between the drive to get students to work faster and what is involved in doing research/writing in socially embedded contexts.

**Pressure points: cultivating stamina and persistence**

In the following analysis, I set my research data within Jennifer Gore’s (1995a; 1995b) analytical categories. Gore developed eight coding categories to create a Foucaultian grid delineating the practices of power in pedagogical contexts. I use only five of these categories: regulation, surveillance, individualisation, normalisation, and classification. The remaining three - techniques of distribution, exclusion and totalisation - are not so directly related to my study.

The crux of my argument is that supervisors use a variety of mechanisms to get and keep students writing. These have different effects depending on whether the intervention is directed towards the student, the thesis, or the construction and maintenance of student-supervisor relations or satisfying the examiners. The power differential between the positions of supervisor and student mediates how these diverse practices around deadlines, frequency of meetings, feedback strategies, and autonomy are played out. However, whatever the style and focus of supervision, students are increasingly required to conform to protocols which bind them to specific identities, conventions of knowledge production, and modes of relating.

I begin with Gore’s more explicit forms of power - regulation and surveillance and then proceed to individualisation, normalisation and classification.
*Keeping the momentum through regulation*

Gore (1995a) maintains that all eight of the techniques of power have regulating functions and effects, but that regulation is characterised by its specific and overt use of control. In this context, I observe that supervisors are able to use their institutional and disciplinary authority over students to strongly influence students’ research/writing activities. This includes overt sanctions, rewards and punishments. Supervisors can also direct students to take specific actions by certain times, set optimum standards towards which students must strive, as well as judge the achievement of stages. In the words of the following supervisors:

The supervisor has the first role of saying it’s not good enough yet, or it’s not the best that you can do. So they have the right to sanction that and then they have the responsibility of sticking with it, to the point where it is good enough to go through. (Supervisor F, Post-meeting I/V2, Q12: 33)

They don’t have to do what I say … but they need to take account of [it]. I sort of try and put it to them all the time that they should try and see me as some sort of surrogate examiner. Every question that they answer of mine is a question that they don’t face in their examiners’ reports. (Supervisor Q, I/V1, Q3A: 100-102)

The supervisor can also insist that work is submitted by certain dates:

But the other important dimension [of feedback for a successful supervision relationship] for this [student] has been that really sort of tough stance of setting times and not allowing too much deviation from those, in the final stages Sally, not necessarily all the way through … And that feedback has been about when X has come back and said: “I haven’t finished the discussion on [names author]”. “Put it in. I want it in now.” … But the content wasn’t the problem for X. Actually giving it over to someone else was the problem because she’s quite perfectionistic. … I
don’t think I’d have it now if I hadn’t been as tough as I was. It was all done in a lighthearted manner. (Supervisor P, I/V3, Q7: 9-13)

The complications of this process from the student’s point of view are revealed in the following comment:

I think she’s tried to [keep me on track] but she’s found it an uphill job. And there have been times where I’ve felt that it might have been good for me to have a supervisor who said: “I want this draft by this date, and that’s the deadline and no getting out of it.”, which X does not do. ... that might have been good for me to have that absolutely strict structure but then when I reflect on that, it wouldn’t have worked with me anyway. I just don’t work ... although I do work very well under pressure. (Student H, I/V3, Q11: 64)

With the supervisor’s authority to enforce deadlines there is the potential to cause anxiety. The supervisor may be willing to compromise to allay the student’s fears:

And X and I realised a long time ago that this was going to be a real challenge to actually get her to complete [on time]. So we sat down with our diaries and we set up times when she was going to give me completed chapters. And X became very anxious about the fact that they weren’t going to be complete so we agreed that she had to give them to me on the date regardless of what they looked like. And we agreed that I would not read them until she was happy for me to read them, but she still had to give them to me physically ... So I actually got all eight chapters out of her with some debate, but I got them all and then they went back to her eventually for reworking. (Supervisor P, I/V3, Q2: 2)

Not only can the supervisor regulate by setting the revision and feedback cycles, they may also urge the student to commit to a certain focus:
... for some people moving relatively quickly to a focused project is not what they want. I mean in the old world of PhDs we could spend years developing a project, great, it was wonderful. ... And I regret the fact that PhDs have changed fundamentally in nature. That isn’t part of what they are anymore. But I’m responsible for [the] PhD project as it’s defined now. Ah, so if someone says: “Look, I want to spend another year working with what I want to do”. I say: “Look, I can’t let you do that”. (Supervisor M, I/V1, Q3A: 110-116)

Being ‘responsible’ for the PhD ‘in the new world of PhDs’ requires new kinds of relational identities, as suggested by McWilliam and colleagues (2002). In line with these, if supervisors are to take their institutional responsibility seriously, and if the student refuses to comply with the supervisor’s process, the supervisor may decide to withdraw from the supervision arrangement:

And in one instance I was a co-supervisor on a project ... and I was trying to say: “Look, I don’t know where this is going and I’ve got some issues that aren’t being addressed. I need to know that relatively quickly.” The other supervisor called that “premature closure” or something. I said: “Look, OK clearly different styles” ... the student seemed happy with the other style, so I said: “Look, I’m more than happy to walk away from this one” ... It’s very much that issue of whether people wish to commit to that process that I bring to it. (Supervisor M, I/V1, Q3A:116)

Supervisors may be well aware of the reasons that delay progress, yet under the new régime feel obliged to push things along:

So that’s my biggest challenge and ... it’s in the forefront of my mind constantly. It’s communicating the need for them to ... get through and finish [on time]. It’s quite a ... difficult thing to do. And students ... I should be careful what I say to you, shouldn’t I? ... come up with the most amazing scenarios. I mean I hate to call them excuses, but you could come down to why ... the work’s not finished, in the end they are excuses and ... they’re very good excuses. People have babies and get married and go
overseas and move house and get a new job. Those things happen ... for postgrads. So I mean it’s perfectly reasonable [to have excuses for late work], but on the other side I’m saying: “You’ve got three years to do this. ... You’ve got to get this done, this done, this done. And we agreed to get finished by three years. You can’t ... finish it [late]”. (Supervisor P, Q3C: 118-128)

Such comments reveal that regulation is a risky/volatile business. Further, and as Gore (1995a) indicates “there are no guaranteed effects of this effort” (p. 176). Regulatory mechanisms may enable the supervisor to obtain work from students and keep them writing; however, such mechanisms may also arrest/hinder the graduate student’s move to independence, and trust in supervision, as we see below. Further, some disciplinary measures may undermine the autonomous ethos underpinning doctoral study, as well as adult learning principles.

*Ensuring productivity through close watching*

Gore (1995a: 169) defines surveillance as “supervising, closely observing, watching, threatening to watch or expecting to be watched”. Thus supervision, as Green and Lee (1999) assert, “carries powerful overtones of ‘overseeing’ (of ‘looking over’ and ‘looking after’) production and development with regard to academic knowledge and identity” (p. 218). In essence, surveillance is unavoidable in supervision since supervisors are directly and personally involved in the close ‘watching’ of students to oversee their progress.

Explicit/direct surveillance may be triggered by the supervisor’s anxiety over the quality of the work or the student’s rate of progress:

I pick up on students getting distressed or not communicating, and those students who don’t come near me for a month at a time. I start sending emails saying: “pleeeease talk to me”. ... Because my responsibility is to see these students graduate basically. So I need to give them feedback
about where they are up to and ask them do they need help and support and what can I do. (Supervisor P, I/V1, Q2B: 88-94)

One way of exercising surveillance is to insist on regular writing, the products of which may then be viewed for progress. As Sinclair (2004) stresses: “[t]ext production is imperative from the outset and is vital throughout the candidature, because it is the basis on which supervisors give advice” (p. vii). Consequently, students are advised to write often and write early. There is an accepted practice of asking students to create a table of contents in the early stages of candidature. Sinclair (2004) argues that this is a sign of ‘good’ supervision. The student’s production of text enables “a constant surveillance and judgement throughout the institutional space. At every prescribed moment, in every prescribed place, somebody should be doing and learning something.” (Hoskin, 1990: 44)

A more proactive supervisor may justify a more direct interventionist style of surveillance which involves contacting the student if and when the student does not initiate a meeting:

I mean I will tell students I’m a fairly hands-on supervisor. Not with their ideas and their intellectual output, but more in terms of: “This is just a degree, like any other degree and you need to complete it, on time. You don’t have to save the world, you just have to get this product out there and I will get anxious if I don’t hear from you, I will chase you up.” (Supervisor P, I/V1, Q2B: 90-94)

The same supervisor went on to describe her approach in the end stages:

Probably in the last eight to ten months, I’ve had a lot more contact with X. I’ve been the one hassling her, I’ve been the one setting dates, I’ve been the one physically receiving drafts, and I’ve been the one when I haven’t heard from her I’ll ring her up and say: “What about a coffee today?” Whereas Z [co-supervisor] has been much more stand-offish. He’ll
read the drafts as they have come in and is much less proactive about the completion process. (Supervisor P, I/V3, Q8: 16)

The supervisor’s authority not only gives her the right to direct the student to submit work by certain times to keep her on task, but also to contact her and keep tabs on her. This attentiveness can be seen as helpful by students particularly if the overseeing is conducted in a relatively informal way:

Yes, I think [my expectations of my supervisor] were [realistic]. And an example of that was the fact that she, towards the end, well through the writing phase of it, we personally met on a weekly basis just to have a coffee to talk about what was happening. ... And I think she directed that, it was nothing to do with me. She just suggested that we should do this because it was more frequent contact and more likely to keep me on track. (Student D, I/V3, Q11: 38)

Nevertheless, the supervisor’s attitude may make students apprehensive about being called to account for missing the submission deadline or because their writing productivity may not measure up. The supervisor relies on the student to do the work and the supervisor needs to take care to gauge the level of pressure she can exert to ensure it gets done:

... she’s very careful. The other day she sent me an email that said: “That she had been talking to my co-supervisor and Y told her to stop being pushy with me because I was fine in terms of my progression. (Student D, I/V3, Q2: 6)

If the balance is right the student will consider her supervisor’s oversight/overseeing to be motivating rather than intrusive:

I think for me, like I wanted to finish earlier this year, but because of problems we had it’s hard. There was a big chunk of writing where we
were at the major writing phase, and she was encouraging but was always apologising if she was being pushy. And I was like: “No, she’s not being pushy”. … she was … just making sure that I maintained my focus and motivation. So I think that it’s been an issue but … it’s not a tense issue. (Student D, I/V3, Q2: 6)

It is when deadlines are strictly enforced or inflexible that these regulatory systems can become repressive. Student D alludes to the potential for stress to delay even arrest her progress, suggesting that supervisors need to judge carefully each student’s limits with respect to their policing of their productivity rates:

But if there was anything … that’s been the biggest difficulty [with my supervisor] that would be [making sure my thesis is in on time], I think. But it’s trying to find a balance between [my supervisor] being encouraging enough to keep you directed or pushing too far that it makes you stressed and lose focus … and just want to chuck the whole thing in. (Student D, I/V3, Q2: 8)

As this and earlier comments suggest, surveillance is exercised through and with the aid of an individualised timetable. It is this which establishes the research/writing rhythms and time disciplines to keep writing going and which also allows the student to judge herself to be “running late” and therefore to be “seen as a problem”. In theory the combination of temporal regulation and surveillance enables the effective use and careful budgeting of time. However it can induce in students a self-consciousness of being watched and judged to be slow. Against this a student may be reassured that she is being watched over and that less is being left to chance:

I like going away and having a bit of a think about [the feedback], but I think I also like some degree of: “Let’s meet again in a week and see what’s happened.” Or, “What’s the timeline? What’s going on for you? When can we meet to talk about how you’re going to do this?” And X
asked me this at the end of the session like: “What are you going to do with this now that I’ve given this to you? What are you going to do with the feedback, are you going to get to this straight away? Are you tied up with data collection at the moment, will you get to it? … So, I like to go away and I guess have a think about it and have a bit of a play with it, rather than have to go this is how it’s going to be done. (Student D, Post-meeting I/V2, Q5: 26)

A second kind of surveillance is whereby students watch over themselves conforming to certain norms and standards, and becoming, in Foucaultian terms, their own ‘guard’, monitoring their own behaviour.

Student participants commented that they like to set their productivity levels to suit their personal circumstances rather than be at the dictate of a mechanistic time frame such as monthly meetings or supervisor-driven deadlines, as illustrated by these two excerpts:

I feel that I’m responsible for managing my project. … I decide when I should see X. I decide how much I should have written by when. So I think it’s me that manages it more than him. He tends to oversee it. … He probably does a lot of the feedback for the university itself. … I mean I set my own deadlines. (Student V, I/V1, Q3A: 141-153)

OK. I guess what works best for me is pretty much being allowed to do my own thing, not being directed, not being told that I have to have so many pages on my supervisor’s desk by next week. (Student H, I/V1, Q2B: 138)

Whether students are watching themselves or negotiating the degrees of closeness that allow their supervisors to drive/influence a more expeditious thesis submission, surveillance is a pervasive strategy which extracts efficiencies by getting and keeping students working since they know they are being watched in very particular ways. As these comments show, after
intervals of no contact or when drafts are late and deadlines are missed
students may expect to be contacted. Further, the supervisor follows-up the
student’s revisions to check on whether they have been carried out. These
techniques increase the efficiency of supervision, yet they are not used in
isolation as they are generally combined with ‘therapeutic disciplines’, as will
now be discussed.

_Promoting writing production by individualisation_

To enable the production of a certain kind of student - one who takes
responsibility for keeping their writing going - individualisation is an important
 technique. It assists in disciplining students’ time and research/writing
practices and in shaping their identity as reliable scholars. In many ways it is a
more effective technique for ensuring the move to independence than either
regulation or surveillance. Effort is best maintained when enlisted voluntarily.
Similarly, getting the thesis written is best accomplished under the student’s
own management practices and personal determination.

The key aims of individualisation are self-motivation, independent discovery,
and self-management on the part of the student. Underpinning each is the
assumption that the student is a knowledgeable subject who works for her
own self-improvement. This approach assumes that the student’s thought
processes, their individual progression through stages of candidature, and
their unique temperaments are available for supervisory attention.
Individualisation thus relies on knowing students and treating them as distinct
individuals with distinct needs. Comparing and monitoring are companion
techniques which provide hierarchies of observation. These enable supervisors
to calculate, describe, and compare student profiles and learning needs (see
also normalisation and classification below):

In a general sense, the challenge of taking on a new postgrad for me is
always trying to figure out what is the route that this student will take
towards that sense of themselves as scholars. And because they come with
different personalities, … different types of projects, … different levels of
expertise in their training … You have somewhat similar conversations but
the nuance of them is very different depending on the student.  
(Supervisor F, I/V1, Q3B: 99)

Such diversity and uniqueness call for flexibility on the part of supervisors as far as students’ research/writing practices are concerned:

Yes, I think that the whole thing really is a learning process too. And the individual differences are just so huge and I know there are students and they feel they are responsible and that’s where they start from and go on from there. There are others who start quite dependent and it’s lovely to see that change and again that’s across genders. ... It really is a process and that is unique to every pair of supervisor and candidate. You can never say categorically that this is what you’ve got to do.  (Supervisor B, Post-meeting I/V2, Q12: 30)

In parallel, students want supervisors who will enable them to work and pace themselves in their own individual way:

[B]ut with the PhD it’s different because it’s such a big, personal project and I think if I’d had a supervisor who was that rigid that it might have worked once or twice. They might have got one or two chapters out of me that way, but after that I probably would have said: “You’ll get it when, when you get it”. Because this is my project, and I really don’t want to submit anything less than the best I can do, and I’m sure X doesn’t want me to either. I want my drafts to be worth waiting for. (Student H, I/V3, Q11: 64)\textsuperscript{35}

Students vary in when they feel their work is ‘ready’ or ‘good enough’ to be shown to supervisors or submitted for examination. Decisions on this have to be negotiated on a case-by-case basis with supervisors. In the following two statements, students comment on their attachment to their thesis and their

\textsuperscript{35} The text in italics was added by Student H after checking the interview transcript.
desire to produce good work. In the third a supervisor makes a direct comment on (her assessment of) a student’s ‘perfectionism’:

I think the PhD process … becomes very much a part of you. It’s your life and blood for three or four years, and more than that for some people and so it’s very difficult to distance yourself when things don’t happen in the way that you expect them to. You can pull back and go: “Well OK, it isn’t the end of the world. And I’m going to finish one day anyway but it just might be a bit later than I expected.” (Student D, I/V3, Q8: 28)

And I do feel a great sense of responsibility to try and get as much done as I can because I’ve had such wonderful support. … But I do feel that when a deadline goes past and I haven’t done it. … I feel as though I’ve let X down and I’ve let myself down as well that I haven’t done it. (Student H, I/V3, Q2: 12-18)

We have worked explicitly on this. … X is a very terse, logical, careful perfectionist. … With the result that actually sometimes it can take her a long time to let a piece of work go forward to the supervisor to read. So we’ve worked hard on trying to break down those assumptions for her. (Supervisor F, Post-meeting I/V2, Q4: 5)

This supervisor went on to comment on the importance of tailoring supervision to a student’s needs if work was to be completed well and on time:

I would advise [a novice supervisor] always to see the student as the centre of the process and that their role is to facilitate and work with that student in the manner in which that student operates. To find the ways in which you can work productively with that person, because sometimes that does mean that you have to push them, and you have to analyse them with themselves: “Why do you do it this way, all the time?” I would advise
them to have conversations with their student about the kind of way that the student works, and the strengths and weaknesses that the student thinks that they have of themselves, and I would advise them to be very clear about the way that they work, in order that you don’t fall into the problem of misreading feedback. And I think that very often happens. (Supervisor F, I/V3, Q18: 92)

The importance of knowing each student individually and “hitting the right buttons” was also commented on by Supervisor M:

And it’s sort of interesting because [a colleague] was talking to [my student] and me about his students. Every now and then and at some point he realised he had to hit one of their buttons. I’ve got other students who I have a lot of trouble with working out what are their buttons and how to hit them in the right way. (Supervisor M, I/V3, Q2: 2-6)

If individualising helps to sustain students’ writing in so far as personal control and their desire to achieve personal authorship is enhanced, then ‘normalisation’ provides the benchmarks which guide what a ‘reasonable’ student should do and when they should do it.

Normalisation and the benchmarks of progress
Among other things normalisation is based on presumptions about a set of developmental stages commonly ascribed to the thesis:

[The most important dimensions of feedback for a successful supervision relationship] depend where you’re at in the process. Most of my efforts go into the first stages, what I call project development. And the last stage which is what I now call “end game”.

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Supervisor M goes on to explain how he works with different students as they progress through these stages:

And the project development phase is really about just trying to keep them on track. Getting them to recognise there are possibilities and making choices amongst those possibilities and then trying to keep to the possibilities they’ve chosen. ... So it’s a bit tough, but in three and a half years it’s developed and some take a bit longer to get through that first stage and some who just want to rush through it. Slowing some of them down and you’re trying to sort of nudge other ones along. You want them to engage in the possibilities and you want them to make choices and then they have to commit themselves to those choices and follow them through. ... And in the last stage of the “end game”, it’s confronting doubts, what the future holds. (Supervisor M, I/V3, Q7: 17)

Supervisors also recognised that, irrespective of the student’s diligence, commitment to order, time-watching, self-discipline and care, it is often simply not possible to control or predict how the process will unfold. There was, furthermore, a sense that valuable learning could occur when things didn’t go as planned:

But part of the process is making mistakes. Going down blind alleys, going around in circles. Part of how I learnt was I made a few mistakes when I was a postgrad. ... I talked to other postgrads to see what they were doing, we talked about what was going wrong, but I gained from having made those mistakes myself, but you learn more. (Supervisor M, I/V2, Q12: 60)

In these circumstances, the job of the supervisor was to reassure the student that this experience was normal, par for the course:

The explicit feedback then, what I would call feedback with a big “F” (deep voice) ... is the reassurance that what they’re experiencing is normal, or that they are doing very well, or that this project that they’re
working on is going to become a thesis ... That it is going to become a
good thesis. ... The moments when I can actually ... reassure them very
clearly and say: “Yes, you now have the thesis. That is the structure that
is going to produce the thesis.” And that can come very, very late in the
process. (Supervisor F, I/V1, Q2A: 60)

More broadly normative assumptions are related to standards of scholarly
achievement. Ironically given the institutional pressures, in the view of the
following supervisor an instrumental attitude toward the thesis on the part of
students can conflict with scholarly standards:

It helps of course if you have a postgraduate that is committed to their
thesis and to the intellectual journey that they’re on, as X is. Because it’s
their project, they do it. I do have other students where they’re far more
pragmatic and instrumental or less inclined to want to take it on, they
just want to get it done quickly, or whatever, so they’re less committed
to the actual intellectual journey itself, and then it’s more difficult to
courage them to be part of that process. Most PhD students are in it
because it’s about their intellectual scholarship. (Supervisor F, I/V3, Q1: 1)

Finally, students are expected to achieve some kind of normative balance
between work and relaxation and scholarship and practicality. As one
supervisor commented “if you don’t keep the process going in a way that
they can cope with and you can cope with you don’t have a supervision
functioning at all.” (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q16: 52) The responsibility for
achieving this is largely placed on students who, as one participant
commented, also need to balance the difficult art of writing and reviewing:

The discipline of writing. It’s very difficult but I think for me I’ve been
doing it too much. I think I have to keep on writing to get it right, for
want of better information. So the question is how have I managed that?
The discipline of writing ... coupled with also the discipline of not writing
... allowing myself time to think about what I’ve written. That’s actually quite difficult as well. Somehow the balance between the two, like writing is really hard, then the discipline of saying: “OK, I’ve written enough, just leave that, and it’s OK to think about it”. (Student C, I/V3, Q8&10: 30-37)

Classification and the assessment of progress

Gore (1995a) gives classification a wide meaning, incorporating “differentiating groups or individuals from one another, classifying them, classifying oneself ... the classification of knowledge, the ranking and classification of individuals or groups” (p. 174). In the following brief discussion I focus on the last of these elements, and consider how a supervisor’s assessment of the student’s work is used to promote progress.

In order to keep students writing, the supervisor’s feedback needs to be tempered. He or she needs to carefully calculate the coverage so that the student knows they need to respond to the comments at hand and also anticipate that further changes are likely to be made. In the following example, the supervisor suggests that she may quite deliberately modify her feedback according to her estimation of the student’s capacity to take things in:

There are always balances here because you can’t also just concentrate on one aspect of the writing and it sounds as if that’s all that the student needs to think about and then suddenly you say: “Oh and there is this as well”. Then students are really upset by that. So it’s perhaps focussing or concentrating on one thing, but also giving some idea of other things that might be changed, or that you think can be left until later, but eventually you will look at them together. (Supervisor B, Post-meeting I/V2, Q8: 8-10)

Another supervisor revealed that he might withhold critical assessment, even fabricate, to keep students on track:
“What do you think of that?” “That’s good for when we’ve got this much paper. Can we have some more please?” You can’t say that to [students] because that’s not what they want to hear and yet I can’t lie very well. So sometimes I don’t read it and just say: “It’s great, it’s fine and it’s going really well, keep at it, brilliant!” And then I’ll think: “Oh gee, if I read it and I had a really honest opinion I might be forced to give those opinions.” … I don’t want to destroy the momentum. And I want them to keep the writing process going. ... So my strategy now is to give feedback and just keep them going. Later on we’ll come to the other sort of stuff. But hopefully by then they’ll have developed their own views about what needs to be done to their texts. (Supervisor M, I/V3, Q15: 47)

The same supervisor went on to elaborate on his decisions to distance himself from critical discussion and assessment at certain points in the process:

Because some of them, what they end up doing is they then become obsessed about a certain aspect of what they’ve given you and they want to talk about that and go on and on about that. And what I want them to do is build upon the paper in the corner. And to get this real sense of progress, something’s happening. ... And the students benefit from a level of distance from what they wrote. So when they come back and re-read it over they are sort of a less engaged writer than someone who did it a year ago and they’ll develop their own sense of it. (Supervisor M, I/V3, Q15: 47)

As the following student indicates such silences or qualified judgements may well be read in negative ways:

[O]ccasionally he’ll say: “It was good,” but he’ll say it offhandish[ly], not to be mean but probably because he is not good at compliments or something. So, I think you need that kind of feedback and reinforcement, just to let you know that you are on the right track because otherwise it’s
like: “Well, there’s a few things wrong with it”, but what does that mean about the rest of it? ... It’s like a trade off between well if they have time they’d like to put in positive comments, but because they don’t have time they’ll just comment on what to improve ... (Student D, I/V1, Q2B: 79-81)

In line with this, another student signalled the importance of the supervisor’s capacity to couple emotional support with the assessment and classification aspect of her role:

Well I think that the emotional support is tied in with the [supervisor’s professional capacities] ... if you’re at a point where you really need emotional support, then obviously the PhD’s in some trouble because of that. So if the emotional support isn’t provided then the PhD remains in trouble, or until you can get past it on your own. But you’re not always going to get past it on your own ... And if X hadn’t done that then I would probably have thrown the PhD in three years ago. (Student H, I/V3, Q11: 54)

Supervisors acknowledged the importance of the kind of supportive relationship mentioned by this student. The first extract illustrates this theme more or less exactly. The second points to the importance of establishing a good working relationship and the time taken to do it:

And, but very often, it’s a really big job for students, they’re depending [on you] when they lose heart, you can’t afford to do so because you’re the one who has to buoy them up. So you have to do that even though you feel sort of dragged down by it too. ... Yes [one must] hide one’s exasperation and frustration too because it wouldn’t be helpful, just undermining to [show it]. (Supervisor B, I/V1, QB: 96-10)

I think perhaps there are more uncertainties where you don’t know the student personally, or you’ve had a limited contact with them, so that’s a
learning curve and sometimes things happen that are quite surprising, 
good or bad. But in the majority of cases with me we’re both known 
quantities to one another, and I really do think … that postgrad 
supervision (then) goes so much more sweetly, …  (Supervisor Q, I/V3, 
Q8: 25)

Supervisors’ ability to offer such support is affected by the time pressures 
discussed at the outset of this chapter and thus may not always be 
forthcoming The following student comments on this and explicitly exonerates 
her supervisors on the grounds of their busyness:

And I do think both my supervisors are very busy and have lots of other 
responsibilities and I think sometimes they read things quickly and maybe 
because they think I can cope with a minimum amount of feedback. I think 
they get it back to me quickly but it’s often rather kind of rushed. This is 
confidential isn’t it?  (Student G, I/V1, Q28: 122)

Finally, supervisors suggested that establishing rapport and giving useful 
assessment was more difficult in the case of part-time students, given the 
time lag between meetings, writing and feedback. Thus one commented that:

Well I think for both them and me, not that this doesn’t happen with 
everyone, but I would say this is quite a common pattern, is that you 
make appointments, they could be once every month or once every two 
weeks or whatever stage the thesis is in. The student phones up and 
cancels time after time and postpones. And so, by the time you get back 
to it, they’ve forgotten what they’re doing; you’ve forgotten what they’re 
doing and you [have to] start almost all over again. And I’m sure I know 
it’s frustrating for them, but it is also for me.  (Supervisor B, I/V1, Q3B: 
80)

These considerations suggest that the student and supervisor are caught up in 
a dynamic relationship wherein the writing of each and every thesis, while
necessarily subject to the processes of regulation, surveillance, individualisation, normalisation and classification, has its own individual momentum, subject also to extrinsic pressures that cannot be neatly predicted or controlled. The bumps in the ride, the highs and the lows, which accompany the research/writing process, repeatedly resurface in the comments cited in this chapter. In contrast, they are rarely acknowledged in the new institutional texts. Here, if they exist at all, they are matters to be managed, ironed out, and in the best of all possible worlds extinguished.

Reflections on the temporal turn in doctoral education: A pedagogy ‘out of time’

The data cited in this chapter reveals few points of convergence with the institutional messages requiring supervisors and students to impose order on a messy and creative process. Supervisor and students’ ambivalence about the new injunctions can be seen in a number of key areas, which are briefly summarised below.

First, it is evident that supervisors were torn about how far to take students' personal circumstances into account when these delayed writing. In general they were sympathetic, prepared to compromise on deadlines and use rules flexibly. They were also aware that ignoring students’ emotional upheavals could further delay progress. At the same time, there was also a tough note in some of their comments - a feeling that timelines needed to be met and objectives achieved. Students generally attempted to comply with expectations but reserved the right to not submit work when they didn’t feel it was ready or their circumstances worked against them.

Some supervisors also said they felt unable to fulfil their supervisory role properly and accommodate students’ intellectual and personal interests. This was allied to their concern that the time devoted to ensuring students were making progress was in line with institutional requirements reduced that
available to nurture students’ thinking and arguments. As well as being antithetical to scholarship, policing students’ time was seen to be detrimental to students’ autonomy. Accordingly, some supervisors reported distancing themselves from their students’ work. In their turn, students appeared to be less concerned about being directed than supervisors were about appearing to be over controlling. Students’ responses on the desired degree of involvement varied, however. Some were concerned by the apparent distance of their supervisor, others motivated by their supervisors’ close involvement, and yet others liked to manage autonomously.

For most students the desire to produce quality work governed their motivation and outweighed time considerations. While supervisors applauded this, they were more conscious of time pressures and at times inclined to judge certain students as perfectionist or too easily derailed by feedback. Both parties consistently acknowledged the unpredictability of producing good quality intellectual work, observing that writing often does not go neatly to plan and changes in unpredictable ways. The importance of making false turns and learning from them was also mentioned.

Finally, both students and supervisors valued thoughtful feedback and regretted that the possibilities for reflective dialogues appeared to be closing down. Despite this there was considerable evidence of close supervisory relationships, pastoral in nature. The ways in which these pastoral care roles are used to achieve certain regulatory aims while also protecting students are the subject of my next chapter.
### Under the wing: the protective pedagogies of supervision

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<th>a female postgraduate student:</th>
<th>a female supervisor:</th>
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<td>Quite often the [feedback] comments are: “You need to address this, or explain more fully, or this needs to be linked” or ... Not like how I imagine I write on first year essays. Because I'm not supposed to be in first year level. So, it’s kind of [an] interesting stand off, because on the one hand, they are doing exactly what I want, they’re giving me constructive criticisms and making me think and I’m challenged, and I have to grow and I have to decide and they’re not spoon-feeding me, which is great because they couldn’t do that. Then it wouldn’t be my study. Then I would feel just as disempowered if they were doing that [spoon feeding] because I would feel that I’m not doing this on my own. Then I couldn’t do it. At least I know that I can. But there’s got to be some form of struggle to achieve that and that’s really nice to know that they’re there.</td>
<td>OK. [My general approach to feedback] starts for me very early in developing a relationship with a student that you’re going to be supervising. There needs to be a conversation in which you talk about: what kind of person are you, and what kind of person am I ... I think for me one of the touchstones of that very early conversation is that I say to them that I am the kind of supervisor that they can cry on the shoulder of. That’s important to me because I didn’t have that. I had a supervisor who had very, very sharp and clear boundaries and limits. And I knew damn well if I was going to have a nervous breakdown over my thesis I didn’t have anyone.</td>
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(Student K, Post-meeting I/V2, Q5: 17)  
(Supervisor F, I/V1, Q2A: 56)
Introduction

Supervision is a relationship that imposes limits to promise much. In one distinctive account, the relationship should be “agitated,” combining “warmth” and “serious intellectual discipline” (Freire, 1996: 167-169). Such values reflect a pastoral ethos that integrates the twin goals of intellectual rigor and personal support. But there is an increasing tension in supervisory practice between getting the thesis written and caring for students’ welfare (Ritchie, Ronald, & Roskelly, 2002). If the caring ethos depends on the capacity to individualise feedback, does this mean that supervisors may have to resist the more techno-utilitarian values of the current régime with its devaluation of “body time” rather than “work time” (Cotterill & Waterhouse, 1998: 13)?

This chapter discusses the ambivalent, contradictory and unexamined aspects of pastoral supervision. By ‘pastoral’ I refer to the idea as outlined in Chapter 2 where I traced its field of meaning to its ecclesiastical roots to pinpoint how it developed through humanitarian values and modernist endeavours. The pastor/supervisor devotedly takes care of the student’s soul in exchange for information, trust, and obedience to a higher authority. In gaining intimate knowledge of the student, the supervisor can lead her/him to salvation - the achievement of the requisite disciplines, a scholarly autonomy and improved well-being.

The pastoral ethos draws on a mode of power which “works, not through imposition or coercion but through [students] investing their identity, subjectivity and desires with those ascribed to them through certain ‘knowledgeable’ or expert discourses” (Usher et al., 1997: 113). According to Hunter (1993), pastoral student-supervisor relations entail interventions such as building self-esteem and motivation through confessional practices which restore students to the state of ‘normal’. Not only does this enhance the pedagogical aim of developing competent scholars, but knowing each student’s personal certainties, doubts and struggles allows pastoral care to sort out permissible and impermissible ideas, before the latter become
hindrances to progress. It also amplifies students’ capacities to “act as their own masters” while, at the same time, deepening “the reach of [the supervisor’s] tutelary powers” (Cruikshank, 1996: 247).

Here I note that a tricky tension exists between the developmental and disciplinary aspects of supervision (Green & Lee, 1995: 44). This, of course, is well known in the literature (Bargar & Mayo-Chamberlain, 1983; Burns, Lamm, & Lewis, 1999; Connell, 1985b; Delamont, Parry, & Atkinson, 1998; Evans & Green, 1995). What is often unacknowledged, however, is the interdependence of these elements. And in overlooking these elements we may fail to acknowledge the power relations invested in the pastoral mode of supervision, neglecting Cruikshank’s (1996) point that “the self … is not personal, but the product of power relations, the outcome of strategies and technologies developed to create everything from autonomy to participatory democratic citizenship” (p. 248). Unless this is kept in view, the ways in which the caring and affective concerns of supervisors are also regulatory and disciplinary become invisible.

This chapter addresses the extent to which supervisors using a pastoral mode of operation are able to reconcile the dual tasks of care and discipline to draw out the potential in students and their work. I wished to know whether, as Hunter suggests, supervisors amalgamate these functions or separate them. Drawing on supervisor and student accounts of their experience of pastoral relations, I map specific forms of subjectivity and knowledge production practices. I identify some of the salient tensions of the pastoral relation, emphasising the difficulties inherent in the simultaneous obligation of being supportive (to individual students) and disciplining (to ensure the production of the requisite knowledge). Underpinning the discussion is an implicit recognition of the gendered dimensions at work. For, as Cotterill & Waterhouse (1998) point out, while the ecclesiastical antecedents of the pastoral relation derive from “a highly paternalistic model of clerical patronage, the modern practice of ‘pastoral care’ has been maternal rather than paternal” (emphasis in original, Cotterill & Waterhouse, 1998: 12).
The protocols of scholarly feedback: Cultivating minds objectively, caring for students pastorally and disciplining texts gently?

Foucault’s explication of pastoral power pinpoints the technologies of the self that are thereby induced. In supervision the pastoral mode resembles what Grant (2005a) calls a ‘psychological’ mode. Here she notes that the ‘Psy-Supervisor’ is “first and foremost a source of motivation and support for the Psy-Student. As a ‘whole person’ (comprising mind and body) she/he has emotions and personality, both of which are relevant to proper Psy-Supervision” (pp. 340-341). This contrasts with what she calls ‘Trad-supervision’, which is characterised by its formal and distant nature, with the interactions between student and supervisor based on “sparring and confrontation” (Grant, 2005a: 341). Under the pastoral mode, relations are expected to be founded on a “supportive interpersonal and intellectual relationship” (Grant, 2005a: 341), with feedback consisting of straightforward, reciprocal and amicable exchanges (in contrast with a Traditional-academic discourse which accents the disciplinary dimensions). Overt disciplining is out of favour (Corcoran & Priest, 1999) and so the disciplinary elements of Trad-ac Supervision are de-emphasised. In certain respects, there has been a move to an educative/managerial frame of reference and to more democratic relationships. Harris (1994) notes that “[e]motions as well as time are to be accounted for: the language of rationality is now more concerned with the ‘development’ than the ‘discipline’ of the self” (p. 113).

Grant (2005b) comments on the pervasiveness of the psychological discourse and the way in which it constitutes supervision as a privatised teaching-learning relationship. She suggests that this construction is invisible because of “the ascendance of the psy discourse of supervision with its heightened attention to close contact, support etc and more emphasis on ‘relationship’” (Grant, 2005b: 138). Pointedly, she notes that she is “hardly able to think outside this discourse … in which who you are, and who the other is, matters” (p. 85).
This helps to mask the actuality of the unequal power relations invested in the psy/pastoral mode of supervision. The changing nature of supervisor/student relations are reflected on by Corcoran and Priest (1999) who argue that:

Today the PhD student cannot be expected to, and increasingly does not, submit cooperatively or productively to mystified disciplinary boundaries or canons of excellence. This is not necessarily to suggest that there has been a rejection or reversal of the hierarchical supervisor-student relationship, and that a new postmodern, horizontal, one-on-one relationship of robustly combative equals has taken its place. That merely substitutes one mystified ideal for another. Rather, supervision tends, increasingly, to be a fluid relationship, negotiated and re-negotiated over a period of years. It may, indeed, include a student’s soliciting support, counsel, directions and intervention from a supervisor to a degree that would have been unthinkable, and certainly unwelcome, ten or twenty years ago. (p. 160)

From this it can be suggested that pastorally-oriented supervisors seek to ‘repair’ the unequal relations and play down the power disparity while also caring for students’ well-being. The requirement that students ‘struggle’ is softened by the availability of a safety net. Accordingly, the essential character of the pastoral relation for the student-supervisor couple is a supervisor who can ‘gently’ reconcile pedagogy, pastoral care, and disciplinary knowledges, thereby uniting critical thought and a ‘proper’ sensibility. These practices of ‘progressive’ supervision entail very particular social relations. But the point remains: namely, what often lies unaddressed, and what may become the source of many misunderstandings in actual supervisory relations, is how this personalised mode binds both parties in specific power relations which are simultaneously productive and problematic (Grant, 2005b).
As indicated above, in pastoral supervision there is a tension between providing emotional support and passing judgement on students’ texts. A widely held view is that ‘over-involved’ supervisors who identify too closely with their students may experience difficulty in achieving the social and emotional distance needed to carry out the intellectual tasks of guide and critic (Hockey, 1994; Lather, 1991). Here the suggestion is that the more traditional supervisor can be more objective and detached from the problem. Whatever the case, the viability of pastoral supervision depends on the supervisor’s ability to combine the dual roles of supporting the student’s developmental needs and making prescriptive judgements of their writing, or as Evans and Green (1995), drawing from Connell (1985b), put it, being able to respond to both “the ‘disciplinary’ and ‘developmental’ sides of their work” (p. 8). Burns, Lamm and Lewis (1999) comment on the difficulty of achieving this kind of balance:

It appeared that a positive, relaxed collegial relationship often eased the student acceptance of criticism and negative feedback. However the factor that was seen as helpful to a number, the informality and growing friendship, could also lead to awkwardness when students simultaneously wanted the supervisor to step into the disciplinary role. (p. 63)

Grant (2005a) argues that unadulterated Trad-Supervision believes that personal matters “have no place in supervision” (p. 346). Supervisors who combine both care and objective distance and students who desire both (such as Student K in the opening epigraph) are thus invoking the core of two apparently competing traditions - Psy-Supervision and Trad-Supervision. Hence my focus in this chapter is on the ways in which these expectations are managed, what kinds of tensions are involved, and on the relationship between the requirement that the supervisor provide objective feedback on students’ work while providing ‘pastoral’ support and attention. I suggest that this relation is simultaneously one of empowerment/enrichment and subjugation (regulation and control). Further, when a student is working closely with a supervisor their words and thoughts may become bound up with
hers; their textual closeness, through working together, “entails a very personal, often very intimate, kind of communication” (Salmon, 1992: 21).

A pastoral reading of the guiding principles of care and discipline

In my initial discussion, one supervisor commented that when she works with a student’s writing she puts who the author is to the back of her mind. The supervisor added that something “not very nice” happens (“not fault finding”) but a stance that is “critical and disembodied” where there is an “objectification of the text”.37 This supervisor’s way of reading a student text implied a particular relationship to the text and the student author. What she was pointing to, perhaps, was that supervisors must combine the reason of the detached scientist in the reading and the critical sensibilities of the pastor for the writing and delivery of the feedback.

In the interviews, I asked other supervisors to react to this approach. Their responses suggested that they used different strategies when reading students’ texts in order to achieve the ‘right’ distance/closeness - most trying to be critical and detach themselves from the relationship they have with the student writer. All supervisors stressed that the challenge lay in the communication of their feedback once they had objectified the text and identified what needed to be addressed. This necessitated bringing the student back into the picture to convey the critique effectively. The diversity of their techniques was striking, highlighting the variety of pastoral modes of supervision and the different priorities involved. Two supervisors explained they read and provided feedback on the basis of their personal reading experience; two emphasised respect for each student’s individuality; two talked about the perspective of an examiner (sometimes with a consideration of the supervisor’s reputation); and for one the crucial factors were her disciplinary responsibilities and her personal ethical and moral values. (The

categories are not exclusive; Supervisors M and F responded in more than one respect and a number of supervisors mentioned examination at various points of their interviews).

In relation to basing feedback on personal reading experience, Supervisor P commenting that:

I’m actually looking for a story. ... And whether it makes sense and whether it’s keeping me interested. (Supervisor P, I/V3, Q10: 22-24)

The reading of the text was also central for Supervisor F. In tandem with this she expended considerable effort in finding an appropriate way of communicating with students:

It’s interesting. I think that there is something in that role as intelligent reader which does put the author in the initial reading of the text to the background, because it is the reading of it that is of interest, not the writing of it. ... For me the reading of a piece of writing is very much initially about the relationship between me as reader and the text. And it’s on the basis of that my feedback is then cast. Now in the casting of global feedback ... then I will think very carefully about the student, and especially if they are a student where I know that I have to tread lightly, then I will work very hard at trying to frame the feedback in a way that will be heard, even if it will be critical. (Supervisor F, I/V3, Q10: 54-59)

This need for caution was typical of supervisors who framed their feedback in terms of student response, knowing its effects on the student were both critical and highly individual. Supervisor F went on to comment that:

So, again, it’s about the relationship. You can’t get away from the need to be constantly thinking through the relationship you have with somebody,
who they are, and what they need, what you are able to give, and about what kind of feedback. (Supervisor F, I/V1, Q4: 73)

The strong presence of the ‘relationship’ in the supervisor responses indicated their concern to balance support and criticism to achieve the ‘right’ blend of the personal and the intellectual relationship. Awareness of this meant that most supervisors, like Supervisor F, explicitly tailored their words and the forms in which their feedback was given. Thus, for example, Supervisor M provides encouragement orally lest the written comments are perceived to be overly critical:

In some ways, well [oral and written feedback] complement to the extent to which the written ones tend to be more critical, ... written more in that voice of the critical examiner. The verbal/oral one tends to be me trying to be supportive and encouraging. And sometimes even diminish the significance: “Look, that was just me. These are the sorts of issues that came to my mind and these are the sorts of things I needed clarification on, that I wasn’t quite sure about ... But that’s just me, you don’t have to treat that as an attack on the project itself. So you may do with that what you like.” So my written stuff tends to be more critical and more abstracted and objectified. And the oral is me trying to sort of soften that a bit, because I’m so much trained in writing in a critical form. ... And their humanity is really important. So you’ve got to feed and nurture whatever that is, them as human beings. And I’m just not trained to do that in the written form. (Supervisor M, I/V3, Q11: 29-31)

In parallel, Supervisor B talked about disarticulating the act of reading/feedback from the delivery of the feedback in order to maintain rapport. In her case, she carefully phrases both the oral and written feedback to ensure its palatability:

I think it’s true one reads the text as though it’s something out there and not produced by somebody you’re very friendly with. However, I think
that when it comes to actually writing comments on that document, or
talking to the person, then it's very different because you are aware of
how that is phrased. (Supervisor B, I/V3, Q10: 17)

Supervisor B also commented on the problem that supervisors are sometimes
driven by the compulsion to ‘repair’ the text. She suggested that there is a
solution to this, namely staying faithful to the meanings intended by the
student:

I’m just thinking about one student, … Y’s thesis is under examination and
that was a big concern. I was not chief supervisor, I was a co-supervisor in
that case, and without question something had to be done as it wouldn’t
pass otherwise. However, I think that even though in that case the
writing was extensively polished, I don’t think it really altered what the
student was saying, just the way in which it was said. So, in other words,
we weren’t adding interpretations or whatever, we were just making it
readable. In general though, I try not to do that. (Supervisor B, Post-
meeting I/V2, Q10: 12)

However, the desire to correct the text is hard to resist if the examination of
the thesis is taken as a judgement of the supervisor’s capacities. Supervisor M
recognised this and the impact it has on the way he deals with the text and
provides feedback:

[The feedback] sort of becomes a bit about you because this is your
student and your thinking about this person in the place of somebody else,
an examiner. ... Well you can’t not take it personally in a certain sense,
but that pushes you to hyper-objectivity. You put yourself in the position
of the highly critical reader because you’re thinking I need to satisfy that
sort of person. And in the end you don’t have to, but it’s very hard not to
because it’s sort of public and it’s you. And you can’t not take any of it
personally. ... So this is me out there. If it’s going to be me, [then] it’s got
to be a good version of me. (Supervisor M, I/V3, Q10: 28)
The enmeshed relations between examiner-supervisor-student-thesis thus make this process a complex one. Some supervisors, on the other hand, are more resigned about the juggling between care and judgment, seeing it as an indispensable part of their work. The following three extracts, starting with the question of the text and then leading on to questions of emotional/disciplinary balance, illustrate her extended considerations on the issue:

I think that’s right [the author is put in the back of my mind]. I don’t see it as not very nice frankly. I see it as part of the nature of the profession, the nature of the discipline. [Names discipline area] intellectual work is about being critical. It’s about reading intelligently and critically and thinking laterally. I don’t mean critical in the sense of negative, but I think the worse thing you can do for a student frankly is to say: “That’s really great!” if you don’t think it’s really great. It’s dishonest, so yes I don’t feel negative about that. But if you think carefully about how you word things more than ... I mean it’s your responsibility to think critically about the text. That’s what you’re being paid to do. (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q10: 29)

Yeah it’s always that balance I think between the personal relationship and the intellectual one. ... But if you lose one it’s no good having the intellectual one. I mean I suppose there are all these stories about supervisors who have an intellectual relationship and no emotional one. But people seem to have survived it and tell stories about it, but I suspect there are a lot of people who didn’t survive that sort of thing. Anyway, I don’t think our students now could cope with it, and anyway, I don’t approve of it morally. Ethically it’s not how I want to deal with it. (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q10: 33-41)

It’s a process of critical support - that would be the balance. You’re both being critical but also you’re being supportive. I find that quite interesting
because I think students gravitate to particular supervisors because that supervisor they can cope with. Like there would be some people who would stay away from me who would think I was too critical, like too in your face. I think there would be some. But there are others who would stay away from me because they think I’m too interventionist and too supportive, they want more space. So I think the student is never a victim. The student makes decisions too about who they come to. (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q5A: 9)

Supervisor Q then went on to provide a classic ‘apprenticeship’ model of supervision, whereby students are ‘kept safe’ until they can be self-supporting:

I suppose what I’m saying is that what the supervisor has is an understanding of the discipline or the profession or that apparatus that Foucault talked about - the professional discourse, the whole apparatus of the profession. Within which this person has alighted as an apprentice if you like, but they have no understanding of it. So you’ve really got to look after them within that because they can’t look after themselves. Although by the end of it they can. I suppose that’s the nature of apprenticeship, you know if you’re a boiler maker’s apprentice the boiler maker makes sure you don’t kill yourself doing the boiler making ... That you operate safely and that you … Yes, it is an apprenticeship system of training. (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q6: 17-19)38

More broadly, supervisors agreed that effective feedback involves a continuum of judgement and a good sense of timing. One of the most

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38 Here this supervisor invokes a traditional-academic discourse in which the master-apprentice metaphor alludes to the intellectual apprenticeship students undergo. As Yeatman (1995: 9) explains: “It is the genius of the apprentice which is responsible for how he takes up into his own creative powers the exemplary virtues and skills of the master” (emphasis in the original). Grant (2005b) notes that “this discourse is absent from most sites of supervision, probably because to many contemporary minds it is seen as elitist and out of date, wrong-headed even” (p. 342). I suspect this supervisor is using it in a more broad sense to convey the idea that the student is not only producing a thesis but also being inducted into academic culture.
challenging tasks was giving realistic and hopeful feedback in the early stages of drafting which didn’t demoralise the student.

(At these early stages) probably offer hope that the chapter can turn into something, or the thesis can turn into something that’s really good. So I guess that would be the first dimension to always offer constructive criticism and ways forward. Not say to throw it back to the student (in a terse voice): “Well start all over again!” Because I think that you’d have to have a very tough student to do that to. (Supervisor J, I/V3, Q7: 16).

The early drafts are the most problematic where you know how far there is to go and you know that in a sense they know how far there is to go, but they’re not really quite clear about it, and you’ve just got to be careful that you don’t tell them that it’s further advanced than it is, or tell them it is so far to go that they feel demoralised. (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q15: 49)

The tenuous balance between offering accurate feedback and keeping students writing sometimes means comments are withheld. Supervisor M expands on why this is so:

OK. I mean I find written the most difficult one and it is something I tend to limit the amount of written feedback that I provide because of the hypercritical tone. … It’s also really hard because sometimes students want feedback and it’s not actually a good time for them to get it. You just want to keep them going and you don’t … And they’ll say: “Oh, what did you think of that?” And (I say) “I don’t actually want to tell you about that. Because I want you to go back and read it later on and after you’ve done something else. And you think about it.” (Supervisor M, I/V3, Q15: 45)

One effect of this screening - protection through deferring feedback - is that students may always/already be judged fragile and fail to get access to the
supervisor’s opinions with which they could deal. A rather different tack is taken by Supervisor Q who emphasised the importance of responding to each student individually:

... but when you pick up your pen you can’t write a single word without thinking about who’s going to read it. There is no point in writing ... even marginal comments, without thinking this is X reading it or Mary or Bill or Bob or Jane because if you don’t think about [their] perception ... I mean I write different tones for my different students. With some of my students I’d write “YUCK!” in the margin, but with others I wouldn’t dream of doing that. So yes. I think about whenever I write anything and I think about when I read it I think, “OK this is what I think, how do I convey that to this particular student? Do I need to ...?” (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q10: 33)

In classically pastoral terms, supervisors also need to be able to read students’ self-doubts and re-cast them in more positive terms:

I think also to be as optimistic as you can all the time. In fact, just recently I’ve told X I don’t want to hear that she’s confused because she’s not confused. Uncertain maybe! But confused means you have no idea what’s going on and I’m sure that’s not the case with X. It’s more an uncertainty. So, I think that emphasis on the optimism ... that she can do it. (Supervisor B, I/V3, Q5B: 8)

While being attuned to students may assist with the progress of the thesis, it can also make it hard to give criticism:

What sort of feedback do I least like to give? Oh Christ! I hate telling them that it’s no good. It’s hard to disappoint them when they think they’ve done something really good, and I need to say: “OK this is good this far, but...” And I only hate to do that when I know that they themselves are vulnerable. So with somebody like X, I gave her feedback
when we met on Tuesday, which probably wasn’t entirely what she wanted to hear. But I was confident that she’s in a relationship to her scholarship and to me, that we can do that. ... I don’t have hassles doing that if I’m confident that they will feel OK about that. But when I do have students that are very vulnerable and I’m unsure about whether they are going to make it or not, then those are very hard. (Supervisor F, Post-meeting 1/V2, Q6: 7)

Another difficulty is that the pastoral relation can be judged as overprotective or condescending. Supervisor Q reflected that:

He always listens, you always know he is listening carefully and he responds in a considered way. So you know he’s listening, so my only worry ever with X is to keep him, and one of my tasks as a supervisor right through is always to offer him suggestions and encourage him to keep going, but it is really encouragement. But I am aware he’s an adult man, he knows what I’m doing. He’s not someone I manipulate or anything like that, like he knows “Oh Y’s [names herself] in the encouraging mode because she thinks I’m a bit depressed.” These are quite subtle things, but then I know that he knows what I’m doing and sometimes we joke. Like I say: “Oh I was giving you a bit of encouragement last time”, and he will say: “Yes I know Y [names herself].” It is explicit, but nevertheless at that point it’s important that I do that because if I contribute to the: “Oh dear you’ve got a long way to go, or there is a real problem with this,” then I will push him further. (Supervisor Q, Post-meeting 1/V2, Q3: 3)

This supervisor is literally ‘watching out’ (as the shepherd does for a member of his flock) even while explicitly recognising the student’s ‘adulthood’. Here she is recognising that a difficulty of the pastoral relation is that in extending their care and disciplinary prescriptions supervisors may inadvertently diminish students’ sense of autonomy.

The supervision literature emphasises that effective supervisor-student relationships combine professional skills and care for each student’s
humanity. Indeed, “[t]he good supervisor is concerned for the general well-being and intellectual growth of the student, and not just with the mechanics of the project” (Brown & Atkins, 1988: 131). With the development of the notion of “the whole person” (Love & Street, 1998: 150), the expert supervisor is expected to “sensitively and flexibly ... (guide) the novice along a developmental trajectory to maturity as an independent researcher” (Grant, 2005a: 341). In this way, showing concern for the student’s feelings and “the need to address and be appropriately sensitive and responsive to the ‘otherness’ of the Candidate” (Green & Lee, 1995: 44), launches a vocabulary of honesty and trust, empowerment and autonomy, open communication, cooperation and equality. These are the privileged domains in pastoral supervisory relations. However the data presented here suggests that such notions disguise the complexities involved, complexities that include withholding and tailoring feedback as much as transparency and equality. Just as important, in their pastoral role supervisors must gather knowledge to discover truths about their students, making them knowable. And crucially, “by becoming knowable ... (students) become sites of intervention” (Usher et al., 1997: 78).

**Tensions inherent in the protective pedagogies of the pastoral relation - an all-consuming relationship?**

Evidently, there are limits to a supervisor’s capacities to understand and know individual students. As one supervisor in this study pointed out, managing the highly intersubjective processes of supervision involves intangible factors and conflicting interests:

> But you know you’re almost in the field of the intangible. How can you make somebody a better supervisor? It’s about the personal. Just how interested are you prepared to be? Just how instrumental and selfish are you in terms of putting themselves first before others? It’s all consumed into the relationship. (Supervisor F, I/V1, Q3D: 164)
As argued in the previous chapter, current pressures could lead to supervisors adopting self-protective practices to safeguard their time and contain potential threats and risks. This supervisor’s response above reflects an uneasiness with any such move, while she recognises, at the same time, that giving one’s undivided attention and being altruistic could have unlimited boundaries. Her desire to give as much as she can to the ‘personal’ suggests a feminist pedagogy, one which is subject to the kind of burn out which Johnson, Lee and Green (2000) describe, in which the women supervisors were exhausted and overwhelmed by the demands placed on them in their efforts to respond to all students’ needs. The predicament was well expressed by this supervisor elsewhere when she commented that: “there is no formulaic solution to the whole issue. It is very much a product of the relationship, which means you’re constantly dancing on shifting sands and uncertain ground, and that’s what relationships are” (I/V3, Q19: 93). In the final interview, the same supervisor spoke of the need to cut off from the loaded relations of supervision and formulate boundaries to protect herself:

... and some of those boundaries will include things like not worrying that a student’s upset about something, and just give them the space to sort it out. I’ve done me bit, I’m now not gonna wear that, I’m not gonna take that home with me, and I’m not gonna stand in the shower and run through it in my head all over again, because I just don’t have as much emotional energy to do it. (Supervisor F, I/V3, Q19: 105)

The other issue raised by this supervisor concerns the unpredictable and unknowable domain of intersubjective relations. While there is an institutional expectation that supervisors will use their knowledge of

39 Corcoran and Priest (1999) assert: “It is certainly true that many (yes, male) supervisors find they spend at least as much time talking with their student about health and financial problems, marital crises, sick children, counselling services, anti-depressants and suicidal tendencies as they do about their students’ thesis research.” (p. 158)
40 There were some important shifts in this supervisor’s practices over the three interviews conducted for this research which can be gleaned from the way she revised some of the comments from the previous two interviews and reflected on the increasing pressures she faced as a supervisor which were forcing her to change her ways of supervising.
individual students and expertise to guide and direct them, the fact is that supervisors will inevitably make mistakes or misread students, misjudging the student (in terms of their mood, knowledge, confidence) and acting inappropriately on the basis of this misperception. They may misperceive the student’s temperament, like Supervisor M who, in the following excerpt, candidly explains how he misread what he perceived to be a student’s defensive writing tone:

... PhD students really listen and they’re really sensitive. And you’ve got to be careful and I’m not always as careful as I should be. ... Certainly, I had another student who developed this really belligerent writing tone and I thought it was a function of overconfidence, but I learned further on that it was a function of a lack of certainty about what he was saying. And I just ... plain straight up misread it. (Supervisor M, I/V3, Q6: 16)

This kind of problem is exacerbated by the very nature of the pastoral relationship between student and supervisor, whereby entering the affective domain requires supervisors’ knowledge of the psychology of each individual student. And, of course, students cannot always be easily read. To this qualification, I would add that supervisors are not necessarily qualified to enact the intersubjective in this way. In contrast, texts on supervision sometimes take the sphere of the intersubjective as transparent and thus amenable to professional knowledge and rational inquiry. The presence of this psychoanalytic discourse was evident in some of the data and is discussed in Chapter 8.

Grant (2005b) comments that “[w]ho you are ... is something more than simply a matter of ‘psychologised individuality’” (p. 85). This alerts us to the fact that any undue privileging of intersubjective can distort other dimensions, such as the need for impersonality and detachment when assessing students’ writing. If as pedagogic, literate, and disciplinary subjects, students are reduced to an interiorised cluster of psychic qualities which are to be known, then mind games can be played, or supervision may be enacted as a game of
‘tactics’ for learning to manage each other’s egos. One supervisor speaks to ‘game playing’ in this way:

First of all, I think you have to understand that this is a teaching role ... and it’s not any other game playing role. You’re not equals, you’re not mates, you’re not there to destroy and rebuild their intellectual frameworks, you’re not there to challenge every last thought they’ve got. You are not there for game playing, I think there is a lot of game playing in the academy. ... It’s about a professional personal relationship. And secondly, you’ve got to be intellectually familiar with the field but you should not think you’re an expert in the field. And if you do you are just going to create a clone or destroy the person or ... it’s not about your own ego. That’s really what I think. A lot in the academy is about academics’ egos. That’s my prejudiced view. (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q18: 54)

In practice, the provision of emotional and intellectual support is likely to work well provided the supervisor limits their role and resists being a counsellor. This also means that supervisors, having listened to personal matters, may need to redirect students’ focus and thoughts back to the thesis:

Because there are some times when the student’s in a mess. This didn’t happen with X, but in a private mess like they’re sick or a family member is sick when you give up the feedback and you offer support for a while. That’s when a judgement about the individual is not an intellectual judgement, well it’s an intellectual judgement, but you’re not judging where they’re at intellectually but you’re judging where they’re at in their personal life. That happens every now and again and you just have to adjust. That can’t go on too long though. You’re not a counsellor. And you’re not even primarily a friend. Although you do become friends. (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q5B: 12).
Sometimes the student’s emotional state prohibits the feedback from being heard and supervisors may need to reassess their usual way of doing things:

And then I’ve also had students where … actually Y and I are supervising a student who seems very defensive and … usually ends up crying or something, which makes it difficult for us because, we’re trying to give feedback that … I mean it’s accepted but then it’s, … it tends to go off and do the same thing again. … and then you think maybe it hasn’t been accepted, and so I guess that’s kind of defensive kind of [reaction]. And somebody who really when you try to be really supportive in your criticism … who just can’t handle criticism at all, and who becomes very emotionally involved with things. I mean I think that’s often difficult for supervisors … to try to … I think R’s life has been sort of turned upside down, although R seems to be getting better at it … I don’t know, but maybe it’s just a way of reacting to things. But I think it makes it difficult for supervisors too. … so how are we going to give feedback, if this is going to always be the response? (Supervisor J, I/V1, Q2B 72-82)

As argued in Chapter 2, the ‘confessional’ is part of the pastoral relationship. One of its dangers is that it can infantilise students leaving them feeling vulnerable, defensive and/or overly dependent on the supervisor for support. If students feel that their self-improvement has come to depend on their “confessions” (admissions of failure, unfinished work, delayed progress and uncertainties as well as purely personal or family issues), then there is potential for undermining scholarship, “especially where the development of independence in thinking is the prime goal” (Grant, 2005b: 178). In this sense, being taken ‘under the wing’ can lead to painful contradictions and disappointments, or a loss of faith (in the work, in the self, in the supervisor).

At the same time, students can feel frustrated if they want help which is forthcoming or given in the ways desired. One of the students commented:

I think probably the biggest uncertainty whenever I get feedback is the initial: “Oh, I know that’s a problem, but it’s a problem because I didn’t
know what to do with it before or what do I do about it now?” And usually Y and X’s response is: “That’s up to you”. And even though I know this, it is up to me and there’s nothing they can do about it really, I want them to. So it’s like: “I don’t know, tell me! What do you think? What shall I do?” … It’s my responsibility, it’s my study and I choose. (Student K, Post-meeting I/V2, Q5: 15)

Here we see the student frustrated by the axiom that doctoral students can discover the answers inside themselves through an authorising inner self. While this may suit most students most of the time (as difficult as it is, as suggested by the same student in the opening epigraph), there are also times when students believe that direct teaching and/or individualised care is warranted.

Finally, just as supervisors attempt to manage the emotional reactions of students, so students work to ‘read’ their supervisors and manage their own responses to their feedback. As the following comment illustrates, this occurs particularly around the return of written work:

... when you get written feedback you never get to sit down with [your supervisors] at the moment you’re getting it. You get it handed back and then you make a meeting time and then you talk about it. So as soon as you get it back the first thing you do, like any student getting an assignment back, is you flick through the pages to see what they’ve written. Because really what you want is a big gold star and say: “Fantastic!” And of course it’s not because it’s a draft. And there’s no way that’s going to happen. And if the supervisor is doing a good job then there’s going to be lots of comments over it. And so you may initially think: “Oh my god, this is crap, they hate it”. So you go through this initial phase of kind of devastation if you like, but then you put it aside, put that emotion aside and a day or maybe a week later you go back through it after you’ve maybe made the changes or you actually look for the meaning in the comments and you can actually synthesise and stuff. Because there’s so much emotion involved you can’t do that straight away. (Student K, I/V3, Q5: 15)
Reflections on this reading of pastoral power in supervision

My main thread of argument has been that the pastoral relation is simultaneously one of empowerment and subjugation (regulation and control, care and discipline). In the context of its ministerial and caring ethos, it operates by constantly ensuring, sustaining, and improving (Foucault, 1994e) - by supervisors protectively taking students ‘under the wing’.

Traces of this discourse are widely present in my data. In reconciling the dual tasks of care and discipline, the supervisors in this study seem to favour indirect disciplining (non-coercive correction). In other words, a supervisor is more likely to invoke a pastoral mode of power which supports the student’s autonomy within a regulatory mechanism which is invitational, rather than exerting direct control through an explicit disciplinary mechanism which is directive (coercive correction). Several mechanisms, based on the notions of self-mastery and personal responsibility, are used to enlist students as “willing self-auditors” (Kendall, 2002: 137). The relation between supervisor/pastor and student/penitent is structured by a knowledge hierarchy which is consolidated by students’ desire for self-fulfilment and submission to individualised care and discipline.

The responses shown here suggest that reconciling pedagogy, pastoral care and disciplinarity were constant challenges for supervisors. While they drew on different strategies in reading and responding, all were careful in the way they expressed their feedback. They had learned to exercise caution and anticipated communication difficulties from having previously experienced unforeseen reactions in students. Comments were slanted so they were appropriate to the student’s stage of candidature. Balancing support and criticism involved a continuum of judgement and sense of timing. Different strategies were used including oral and written feedback for different purposes and the separation of author and text to discipline the text and not
student. Supervisors sometimes engaged in reprogramming students’ negative thoughts, self-doubts, lack of confidence etc. There was a consensus that robust student-supervisor relations could accommodate critical comments provided the student’s scholarship was also strong.

There was also a sense that some ‘magic’ was involved in getting the ‘right’ combination. The contemporary supervision literature assumes that personal relations are explicable by systematic rational (cognitive) inquiry, thus embodying a technical interpretation of supervisors’ efficacy. However, the data suggests that personal relations cannot be explained rationally and nor can supervisors be ‘trained’ to bring out the best in students. McWilliam and Hatcher (1999) expressed this very concern in their response to Lee and William’s (1999) valuable (if not controversial) work on the necessity of trauma as a central element of scholarly formation. In their response to “Forged in fire,” they argue that the development of supervisors’ emotional literacy is being subsumed by the rationalities of human resource management.

Nevertheless, my data suggests that the intersubjective dimension is crucial to the pedagogies of feedback. Supervisors use personal support productively to protect and guide students. While there may be some truth in Usher et al.’s (1997) suggestion that the techniques of power embodied in confessional practices are “cloaked in an esoteric yet seemingly objective expertise and a humanistic discourse of helping and empowerment” (p. 115), I found that the supervisors in this study were more open to talking about their enabling/developmental/pastoral caring than their disciplinary roles.

Wisker, Robinson, Trafford, Warnes and Creighton (2003) suggest that “the supervisory relationship is the primary one for ensuring that a wealth of personal and cultural issues and experiences are addressed, as much as for ensuring that students are guided and empowered to be autonomous learners engaged in a topic ...” (p. 384). The data presented here largely supports this, with the proviso that the supervisors’ attention to students’ becoming autonomous scholars was more evident than Wisker et al., would suggest.
Whatever the balance, relationships in supervision will fail, at least some of the time, to live up to the “wholesome mentoring relationship” (Bargar & Duncan, 1982: 30) they are expected to represent. Grant (2005b) argues that institutional regulations work on:

a binary of good supervision/bad supervision thus ruling out the more likely (in practice) messy middle zone that constitutes ‘good enough’ supervision. In this way, codes are unable to address many of the messy tensions that confront supervisors and students within the lived experience of supervision. (p. 114)

A Foucaultian understanding of power insists that it is exercised with or relationally (not just over and oppressively).41 This cautions against any ‘innocent’ reading of the pastoral relation given that it opens intimate aspects of students’ lives to scrutiny. Nevertheless I maintain that supervisors’ mandate to work with the personal can assist in the production of the thesis. My argument, then, is not that pastoral care for students needs to be abandoned in preference for discipline because it relies on mechanisms that have covert regulatory effects. Nor do I suggest that disciplining should be rescinded. As Freire (1996) notes “[w]ithout rigor, without seriousness, without intellectual discipline, the advising process is frustrated and fails to meet expectations” (p. 172). Rather, my contention is that the need for ‘emotional work’ should be understood as an important complement to disciplinary work; that both should be openly treated and discussed (within the limitations that constrain this); and that the two should be seen as complementary not oppositional.

This open articulation of the pastoral with liberal humanist notions of autonomy would avoid the problem of relying too heavily on one or other of these elements. An over reliance on the pastoral dimensions, with its

41 There is tendency not to see the intersubjective elements as a form of regulation. For example, Love and Street (1998), acknowledge the power asymmetry in supervision in terms of knowledge, but argue that “[e]quality is achieved at the relationship level, even though the different roles ensure that full equality can never be achieved” (p. 155).
preference for supporting and encouraging students’ through *indirect* teaching, may ignore the need for *direct* teaching as well as masking the particular kinds of power relations at play. Equally, an over reliance on self-disciplined autonomy may leave the student isolated and unsupported and, if and when they fail to conform to its idealised representations, judged (and self judged) as a personal as well as an intellectual failure.

To look further at the actualities of supervisory power relations and their variants in changed educational contexts, I now turn to an analysis of the ways their relations of mutual dependence are played out in supervision as students are ‘authorised’ to become independent scholars.
Chapter 6

Under author-isation: unburdening concepts of autonomous authority

a female graduate student:
[My supervisor's feedback has helped me establish my voice] [m]ainly through encouragement I think because for me, my biggest enemy has been my own lack of confidence. ... And so sometimes ... it's been really important having that kind of external voice pointing it out for you because I don’t think that otherwise I would write probably with my own voice, solely because of a lack of confidence I suppose. And also because everything else that you’ve done, pretty much your whole academic life, has been synthesising other people’s work, which is what someone else has thought. And so all of a sudden you’re supposed to be making your own thoughts. So, through the encouragement I think and just making it very clear and explicit what my ideas are separate to everyone else’s ideas in the literature.

(Student K, I/V3, Q1: 1)

a female graduate student:
A seems to like reading and stuff and A always says: “Oh that was really interesting or I really enjoyed that, or you write really well”, ... which I like because it’s an important thing to have an audience if you’re a writer. I’m seeing myself more and more as a writer.

(Student G, I/V1, Q3A: 134)

a female professor of Psychology:
Taking authorship of one’s own project entails going profoundly against the grain of most academic activity. To acknowledge in one’s own work deeply personal directions and concerns - this is a daunting and a daring thing to do. It requires an act of inner assertion, a claim to own something of a topic which is widely seen to belong not to individual persons but to the whole scientific community - to the published literature, the big names. To make such a claim demands ceasing to hide behind the skirts of others, fearful of making any statement, any judgment, that cannot be supported by a reference to a published work. As Becker (1996) puts it, students have somehow to stop being ‘terrorised by the literature’.

(Salmon, 1992: 15-16)
Introduction

A graduate student needs courage to develop an authoritative voice in the face of the overwhelming presence and constraining orthodoxies of the academic community. The intricacies of the fragile and difficult formation of authority, the need to negotiate ideas with others while building a sense of self as author, are the focus of this chapter. Where the previous chapter looked at the nature and limits of the pastoral relation, this chapter draws attention to the oppositional tensions between becoming an authorised academic subject and being subject to a supervisory régime.

The chapter covers perceptions of autonomy; authorship; the process of authorisation; and desire, emotion and authorising strategies. The discussion renders visible the multiplicity of authorising strategies and their implicit assumptions about autonomy and the process of feedback as well as the construction of subjectivity and the play of power/knowledge/desire relations. I examine the different mechanisms that supervisors use to grant authority and students to assert it. Authorisation is a double action in that students are responsible for the use of the feedback, and subject to regulation by the feedback. My discussion highlights the ways that it is only students who can ultimately make decisions about the use of the feedback. In this way I suggest that students actively participate in their own scholarly formation through various self-disciplines and assuming responsibility for their research/writing. However, at the same time they are always constrained by their reliance on supervisors for authorisation. The supervisor’s structural location bolsters their feedback and lends it authority. Such authority is both persuasive and regulatory - it is focussed on getting the thesis written.

Unburdening autonomy - myths about original ideas and “all my own work”

Within both traditional and pastorally-oriented modes of supervision, the ideal scholar is autonomous and self-directed. When the supervisor is situated
as a distant and objective expert, the student is supposed to be free to shape their ‘original’ textual creations. While this notion is no longer particularly prevalent, it never entirely vanishes (cf. Grant, 2005a). Indeed, vestiges of the traditional-academic discourse, as I argued in the previous chapter (“Under the wing”), join forces with Psy-Supervision in providing the gentler, interpersonal mode of guidance characteristic of the pastoral mode. Against this background, I provide a selection of student and supervisor views on autonomy and the impact of feedback in this respect. The citations include students’ views on whether the pressure to be an autonomous scholar places an excessive burden of self-responsibility on them. I start with general perceptions of autonomy.

Autonomy is often experienced as isolation. For one student it constitutes:

… independence, from what I’ve seen, gets confused with isolation a lot. … I’m not sure … if it’s a perspective that the School … or the academics give to students, or whether it’s just something that the students have because of their own expectations. But independence isn’t synonymous with isolation and I think that’s what happens. (Student D, I/V3, Q7: 23)

This student also commented on how her views changed as she moved from being a novice to a more seasoned researcher:

I felt throughout the PhD that this has to be my own work and therefore I can’t talk to anybody about it. … For me especially earlier on, not later on when I actually realised that I could actually talk to my supervisor, but earlier on I thought that this was something I had to do on my own. And if I didn’t do it on my own it meant that I wasn’t suited to the academic world. (Student D, I/V3, Q7: 23)

Like this student, others, while in the early stages of candidature, felt that they should wait and worry rather than clarify their concerns because the
boundaries between them as ‘autonomous’ scholar and supervisor were unclear:

I didn’t know what I was allowed to ask for. And in that first year it was such an emotional roller coaster, I was sort of really excited about the subject but I was so depressed about the restrictions. ... And I was really worried and it was a while before I realised about that. So that I could actually talk to my supervisors about it and they were really good. (Student K, I/V1, Q1B: 30-38)

This student comments that in the end stages she came to hold a different view of her supervisors:

In the last [stages] ... probably now my expectations are more realistic again, but in the last year I think they’ve gone through very unrealistic phases, but that’s been more to do, for me, with what I want and felt that I needed, and I needed to go through that and to discover that actually I can do it. And quite often my supervisors tell me that: “You can do it, so don’t worry”. (Student K, I/V3, Q11: 28)

As part of these reflections the student considered the process of ‘growing up’ and what this meant for supervisory relations:

Because they’re not even just like parents are not the person who can wave a magic wand and make it all better, I still have to go through the struggle. And just because they’re my supervisors they’re not going to fix everything for me. But, you don’t really want that to be that way. So my biggest challenge has been me learning that. ... Learning to be independent and learning to put difficulties into perspective I think. (Student K, I/V3, Q2: 4-8)
The uneven shifts in students’ move to autonomy may mean that even in the late stages there are misunderstandings. In this case supervisors may consider that they need to engage in ‘second guessing’ as students are sending them unclear messages about their need for assistance:

I think the one thing I’ve struggled with a bit and, I’ve thought about it a lot and I’m not sure I yet have the answer is that ... X would, often seem to me from my perspective, to be ... asking for help, but didn’t want the help. So, I’ve put that down partly to the [difficulties] that she has had to cope with ... in that she may have been like too tired or too anxious or something. But that was sometimes hard because I didn’t know if I was misunderstanding what it was she was wanting. It seemed as though she was wanting to know whether she should do something one way or another and what I thought, but that didn’t seem to be the case. So sometimes I felt I was sort of stepping on her toes. So, I’ve not quite resolved that. I’m just aware of it and I try not to get into that sort of situation. (Supervisor B, I/V3, Q8:11)

The expectations of autonomy (often tacitly formed) influence how much help the student accepts and how much the supervisor provides. In the following excerpt, Supervisor B notes how the stoic independence of some students can undermine the process of completion and submission:

You wouldn’t want a person to be totally independent and autonomous. I can think of at least two of my students who actually are quite far down that line, they have that sort of view too [of how autonomy is demonstrated], they are not going to do it, they are not going to hand [the thesis] over until they think it’s just about perfect. So it works the other way too I think. They [i.e. fiercely independent students] have that expectation themselves, they come with that expectation. (Supervisor B, Post-meeting I/V2, Q12: 30-36)
The feeling that no one else can assist, and the consequent need for extreme self-reliance, represents a situation in which autonomy is fuelled by notions of struggle and crisis. Here the very alone-ness of creative research can lead to a reluctance to elicit and accept supervisory contributions precisely when they are most needed.

So far these excerpts suggest that students struggle with ambiguous institutional messages as well as their own personal expectations regarding the ‘proper’ nature and meaning of autonomy. As a result, notions of autonomy and the supervisory relation in which they are embedded are full of mixed emotions: fear, admiration, deference, disappointment, entitlement, fraudulence, belonging and commitment, among them. In the case of the two students cited above autonomy was experienced in the context of binary oppositions between isolation and co-operation, independence and collegiality, and ownership/collaboration. In other cases, autonomy carried a more obviously positive force. It was perceived as a qualified rather than a total status, characterised by interdependence rather than solitary authorship. Reflecting this view, one student commented:

… the notion of the autonomous scholar is a bit of a furphy, in a sense. … you do work so much with other people, you do build up what your argument [is] and your knowledge upon the basis of other people’s works. And so it’s a limited sense of being an autonomous scholar. (Student Y, I/V3, Q7: 8-30)

An allied supposition is that autonomy is a kind of freedom sanctioning personal control over knowledge and interests, allowing the student to seek assistance and feedback from whomever they choose:

I believe that autonomy and self-responsibility are great freedoms. … I feel I’ve had more constructive feedback and ideas and inspiration from others who I have consulted about my research compared to my
supervisors. I think that this is a measure of how comfortable I am with autonomy. (Student G, I/V3, Q7: 23)

The notion that students should, within limits, be free to develop their own ideas is reasonably well established in contemporary supervision practice. This was recognised and endorsed by the following student who suggested that her most important contributions from her supervisor came:

I guess mainly through just allowing me to go off on tangents and follow my own paths and change direction, make fairly significant changes to the trajectory of the thesis according to the things that I’ve discovered while I’ve been doing my research. And just constantly supporting ideas that I’ve had, not trying to impose X’s own perception of things, but rather supporting what I see as important. And with that pointing out various things that I could maybe have a look at, without sort of pushing anything at me as something that I absolutely needed to take into consideration. … And it’s because I’ve been encouraged or allowed to go off and do those things that I’ve found things that make the thesis stronger. (Student H, I/V3, Q1: 1-7)

Another student commented on the helpful nature of the process when her supervisors engaged with her meanings rather than judging them according to some prescribed template. In this way she flags how being identified as an author (someone who can be read) as opposed to a learner (someone who has to fix up their texts) authorises the student. On this she reflected that she most appreciated:

The fact that they’re interested in what I’m saying. … And that’s the first thing that they comment on is their own reactions. Again it’s this idea of reader or assessor. I think their approach suggests to me that they are readers and they are engaged first, before they are assessing. … (my principal supervisor’s) comments are related to what [she] understands about where I want to go. … so she’s allowing me my voice and she’s responding to what I’ve done on my terms, rather than assuming a
particular perspective. So that flexibility, that ability to be open, to hear what you’re saying. That’s essential. (Student G, I/V3, Q24: 70)

In turn, supervisors recognised the importance of providing feedback that ultimately left the responsibility with the student:

I made it clear right from the beginning and throughout the whole supervision that I was not going to find the themes, the argument, the conceptual shape of this thesis, that X was going to find it himself. ... I don’t believe that I ever tell them what the themes or argument or analysis is, I extract it from the text and I say: “This seems to be what you’re saying. Is that what you’re saying?” (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q1: 1)

Leaving the responsibility to the student involves:

... read[ing] really carefully the text that I’ve been given. And in the process of doing that you give them confidence in what they think they were saying. You strengthen the direction in which they’re going. But also you help to make their argument, their analysis, their themes explicit. (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q1: 1)

For this supervisor, the student’s voice emerges from being prompted to express confidently what is implied:

I say to them: “This doesn’t have any direction, where is it going, what are its themes and what are its concepts?” And then I don’t say what it should be, I say to them: “Well what is it and what are you trying to say?” Then we have a discussion, so it’s an iterative process of making explicit what I see as implicit and in that way it’s their voice always. (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q1: 1)
It comes as no surprise, perhaps, that supervisors were, on the whole, reluctant to own the more directive aspects of supervision and more willing/eager to talk about its ‘enabling’ role. Supervisor F, for example, said:

Yes. I don’t think I am very directive as a supervisor at all. ... I never tell somebody go and do such and such. I usually say things like: “It would be a good idea if you went and checked out that stuff and see if it is useful to you”. The task of the PhD for me is that the student makes the transition to being a scholar, and you can’t do that without giving them the responsibility of their own scholarship. So you can’t direct somebody to think. You have to facilitate their confidence to do it for themselves and that’s my bottom line. (Supervisor F, I/V1, Q2B: 68)

All the supervisors in this study agreed that they should not (evidently) direct students in what to think. Nevertheless, they clearly did have ideas about ‘right’ (and less right) ways to think, infused with particular notions of intellectual autonomy. This was to be encouraged by a ‘non-directive’ approach in which the supervisor engaged with the student’s text, asked questions, pushed for clarification, and prompted further investigations. They thus followed the pattern whereby “the supervisor is caring, solicitous, not disdainful or indifferent, but nevertheless ‘master’, in control. He [sic] acknowledges that the students go through considerable stress and pain, but this is necessary to the process of development, of attaining maturity.” (Johnson et al., 2000: 142)

The notion that the development of students’ autonomy involves limiting the supervisors’ prescriptive powers is deceptive because it occludes the ways in which supervisors can use powers of office, persuasion, ‘ethos’ and even ‘kindliness’ to prompt and encourage particular intellectual practices. The very process whereby students “must experience themselves as in control, as author of their intentions, as exercising free will and independence” (Johnson et al., 2000: 142), masks the manner in which supervision works to give the impression that the student is self-supervising. In the following sections, I look
further into the power relations which supervisors exercise and identify the strategies which authorise and de-authorise students.

**Authorship under construction**

Supervision literature gives little critical attention to questions of authorship. It tends to be assumed that students own their texts, do their own thinking, and are responsible for the quality of their own work (albeit with different notions of how authorship is cultivated, endowed and maintained, and what contributes to a lack of it). The situation is the more complicated because of the many and varied meanings which can be attached to textual authorship. These include the capacity to claim authority over one's text, to feel personally connected to one's text, to project an authorial presence or voice in one's text, to guard one's intellectual property. It is not surprising, then, that the ways in which supervisors invite students to take up an increased investment in ‘authorship’ and develop a sense of project and process are poorly understood.

In the following discussion, I explore these issues in terms of the various dimensions of pastoral power. The need for the supervisor to be recognised as expert and for students to assert their expertise as credible knowers mediates the ways in which feedback is given and received. In this process, the tensions embedded in the student-supervisor relationship produce a paradox of accountability. In the supervisory relation the supervisor is seen to know best, and, on the whole, exonerated from the task of explaining how they arrived at their own judgements. At the same time, students are also positioned (ideally) as autonomous learners. This means that both must work hard to displace the notion that “there can only be one authoritative voice in an instructional space” (Alexander, 2005: 7).

Supervisor B’s comments suggest that she attempts to counter this difficulty by aiming for the situation where each party works collaboratively as well as independently:
So, what I try to [do] in a piece of analysis is say: “Do you think it would be useful if you did this and this?” And then I would say to the student: “Would you be happy with that?” And often the student would say: “Yeah that’s fine”. They do that and then they come back and say: “And I’ve also included this” and I’ll say: “That’s great”. To me that sort of interaction with both contributing is really good and that I think is the best thing that one can do. ... And some students more than others are independent and sometimes that position is definitely reversed where they come and say: “I’ve done this” and you say: “That’s really great, so what about doing this extra bit as well?” so that can go either way, but both of [you] are contributing. (Supervisor B, Post-meeting I/V2, Q12: 16-18)

In this case the supervisor’s expectation of consultative decision-making allows her to oversee the emergent thesis text as a co-knower through elicitation of what the student wants to say/write:

... My goal would obviously be for that person to be independent and that doesn’t mean to say they always make all the decisions themselves, but feeling confident enough to say what they want to happen and negotiate what they want beyond any sort of thesis [question], but in any situation that they would be able to talk about it. (Supervisor B, Post-meeting I/V2, Q12: 30)

In promoting authorship supervisors may devote substantial amounts of time in indirectly transforming students’ scholarly capacities. In the words of Supervisor M:

... I guess I see myself as an adviser. The project is the student’s project. They’re responsible and in control of it and I am there as a sounding board, where they can throw up issues, ideas, questions, problems. So I want the text [to be] their text. Even when there were problems, even
when I had issues with the writing style I had to say: “Look, if you want to write this way that’s fine, I think we’ll have all these problems. This is how I reacted to it.” But in some ways I leave them in control of it, so talking I see is a better way to make clear the fact that I’m not producing text or I’m not making the text into anything. I’m talking to them about the possibilities for their texts. (Supervisor M, I/V1, Q2B: 90-92)

Here the supervisor is careful to leave a level of control and choice with the student and to leave open what it is ‘possible’ for the text to become. The same kind of caution is expressed by Supervisor Q who recalls how experience has modified her desire to correct, polish and improve:

I think as I’ve become a more experienced supervisor I’ve made myself be more flexible in my expectations. I think when I first began I had clearer views about how things should ... and shouldn’t be done. And I had less sensitivity to the sensitivities of other people and students. ... and I’ve taken up my pencil, my red pen it used to be, and written all over people’s work. And as I’ve got older and especially in postgraduate supervision, I’ve come to understand it much more as a sharing of ideas rather than me directing and I’ve had one student who once said to me: “Did I know that red was a very negative colour?” So I switched to [pencil], I mean these are really silly things. But they do somehow summarise where I’ve moved from. (Supervisor Q, I/V1, Q1B: 38)

Despite this democratic ethos, the authorisation process, and the bestowal/earning of authorship, are first and foremost about power/knowledge relations. A graduate student is ‘under’ author-isation, as suggested by the title of this chapter, in two senses of the word. First, they and their theses are “under the authorised and authorising gaze of [a] researcher-academic, as it were standing in for the field of study in question and for the Academy more generally” (Green & Lee, 1999: 218-219). Second, they are subjects who are actively producing themselves as authors (see Foucault, 1972: 60). In this context, Grant observes that “neither the supervisor nor student can escape the workings of power because it is the
productive ground of supervision, it makes things happen, indeed it makes supervision what it is” (2003: 186). She also reflects that such relations produce pleasure as well as apprehension and that this dynamic may be “a crucial technology for getting the work - the supervisors’ and the student’s - done” (pp. 217-218).

In the following extract, the student’s faith in the supervisor’s breadth of experience convinces her to ‘get the work done’ (in the manner asked):

And I would see it as, well, X has done this, he knows how to do it. He’s got the experience, I don’t. So if he was to say to me that I would need to rearrange some of the points to have it make more sense, I’d say: “Fine”. And then if at a later point he said: “OK, perhaps you need to rearrange them again”. I probably could be frustrated, but I would accept his word because he’s the person that’s done it and he has that experience that I don’t have. (Student C, I/V3, Q20: 77)

When supervisors provide feedback they are heard to speak with authority, given their institutional backing and experience. Feedback is thus relayed with an air of ‘truthfulness’, in the Foucaultian sense of “that which is produced by power” (Pennycook, 2001: 92). This can reduce the student’s capacity to speak back when the feedback is negative. In negotiating (and possibly obscuring) this asymmetry, supervisors frequently aim to ‘lower the stakes’ and democratise what is going on. Hunter (1988) suggests that in this formulation as collegial equals, the pastoral tradition portrays the supervisor as a figure who:

relays new social norms through a purpose-built personality - part friend, part parent, part exemplar - which [students] would wish to emulate; finally, a figure through whose unobtrusive yet ever-present gaze [students] could look at themselves and see the kind of person they must become (p. 16).
In such ways power relations can remain covert and shadowy. Lee expands on this point:

The Authorship arch-metaphor ... involves, at base, a relationship between the student-writer and the text, a learner-oriented relationship. ... Within the terms of this metaphor, the role of the supervisor is indirect, shadowy, its power diffused. For Salmon, pedagogical power is often exercised by ‘holding off’, waiting, refraining. This is an invisible pedagogy par excellence, where power and authority appear something other than what they are. (emphasis in original, Lee & Green, 2004: 12)

Grant (2005b) adds an important further dimension to these considerations when she suggests that in the supervisory power/knowledge matrix the actions of both student and supervisor are modified by the actions of the other, and “lived out in various productive but constrained ways” (2005b: 86). This means that despite the asymmetry of the power/knowledge axis, students can affect and mould the process. More precisely, student and supervisor can “both modify the actions of the other” (emphasis in original, Grant, 2005b: 85). They have power to “act on the actions of the other - although with unpredictable and mixed effects” (Grant, 2003: 186). This iterative process takes place in a context in which, as Gordon (1994) asserts, “the individual impact of power relations does not limit itself to pure repression but also comprises the intention to teach, to mold, to conduct, to instil forms of self-awareness and identities” (p. xix).

So far we have seen how supervisors reported encouraging students to discover/investigate for themselves, through reading and engaging with their ideas, validating the student’s voice, and sanctioning the student’s personal control over their knowledge and interests. This enabling of ideas, strengthening of themes, analysis, arguments, and building confidence in self and text entails giving students responsibility for deciding how to take up supervisory feedback. I now turn to some of the desires and motivations embedded in these processes.
Authorisation and the desires of students and supervisors

Desire is one of the more intangible aspects of supervision relations. As Lee and Williams (1999) suggest, “[b]ecoming an independent scholar necessarily involves psychodynamic mechanisms of identification and investment in the subject position of the scholar, a desire mobilised by the perceived rewards and benefits of its attainment” (p. 10). For Simon (1995) “desires mobilized in pedagogical relationships, with their experiences of pleasure and pain, have been important aspects of university-based teaching and learning” (p. 95). Desire powers the performances of learning, pedagogy and subjectivity and makes new forms of identity possible by enhancing the capacity to be and to do.

Jones (1996) suggests two main understandings of desire. According to the first, desire is predicated upon a lack which will be eliminated when the student is filled up with the supervisor’s knowledge (students hunger for/crave their feedback). Grant (2005b) notes that this kind of desire “produces the student as a feminised subject who, passive and lacking, seeks the masculinised supervisor to fill ‘her’ with ‘his’ knowledge” (p. 87). Here power and desire are configured in terms of domination and subordination. According to the second understanding, desire is a creative and productive force cultivated through the energy of both parties - in this case, student and supervisor - as they interact.

In either case, the authorisation process involves specific forms of self-discipline in which students negotiate their desires with their supervisors - who they want to be, what they want to say, how they want to say it. This sets conditions for different investments (in the thesis text, the supervisor, the body of knowledge, the research/writing process, the oral and written feedback). Students engage in what is at times a comfortable process, entailing pleasures (of discovery that involves new learning and investigation), and, at others an uncomfortable one, entailing pains (of unlearning that
involves renouncing a safe position) (Simon, 1995). In Simon’s view the process of authorisation produces “a series of overdetermined and affect-laden image-texts” (emphasis in original, p. 98) of the supervisor as a person “whose actions matter to students” (p. 99).

To tease out these relations, I draw from my data to show how desires for power/status and freedom/self-expression exert pressures on both student and supervisors as they negotiate what it is to come to ‘know’ and to ‘own’ one’s thinking. I describe various motivations for authorisation gleaned from the student and supervisor responses. The discussion takes place in two parts, relating first to student and then to supervisors. My selection of excerpts illustrates factors associated with “the institutionally structured situation of doctoral education” (emphasis in original, Simon, 1995: 96).

Authorisation and student desires

Desires for endorsement, recognition, legitimation
In the following excerpts students speak about the importance of feedback that takes their ideas seriously and provides a sense of personal validation.

[The best thing about my supervisor’s feedback is] that it’s thoughtful ... in that it makes me think about what I’m doing. And that it is about me in a way, that X provokes questions as to what do I think, what do I want to say? ... It’s about my knowledge. (Student C, I/V3, Q24: 87-89)

I think oral feedback is very important and I always try and write things down when X is saying them. ... But by the same token, there’s more than just the content feedback. There’s more than just the remembering. It’s the feeling you come away with, being supported and encouraged and I think that probably would be the most important thing. And feeling that you’re on the right track. (Student K, I/V3, Q23: 46)
Two important points stand out here. First, the desire for personal validation; second, the importance of the supervisor’s role in this respect. Further, it is the ‘after feeling’, often derived from the tone of comments that sustains students, not necessarily the content of the feedback. Comments from the students also suggested that the effort to please the supervisor, show they are worthy of their attention and engagement is also a motivating factor in how the work gets done. In Simon’s (1995) words this is a dynamic wherein:

the acts of each party in the pedagogical relation are structured by how each “reads” and “invests in” the other as the locus of ambitions, aspirations, fears, and anxieties. These actions incorporate, if not presume, a hoped-for intellectual and emotional return. This circulation operates both in fantasies and in fact to define a set of possible complicities among people whose learning is conditioned by the play of desire between them. (p. 95)

Desires to be self-authorising

My data suggests that students actively manage the process of feedback and authorisation. As they gain confidence, perhaps further into the drafting process, they may ask for feedback rather than passively awaiting what the supervisor thinks they need. In this way they express their desires to be self-authorising and guide the research process:

And so now when I hand in drafts and it’s something that’s actually developed really over the last five months I actually ask for specific things: ... “I really want you to focus on these two chapters and this is what I’m looking for, whether the structure’s clear, whether the point of the chapter is clear, whether it fits into the whole thesis.” So, I think that’s actually been helpful to both my supervisors too, that I’ve been clear about what I want from them. (Student K, I/V3, Q4: 14)

In devising means to elicit the kind of feedback they need/look for the student retains the locus of control. In this manner they set in train a process
of self authorisation. Being clear-minded about the feedback desired was also a means for overcoming disappointment and anger when the supervisor’s feedback was lacking or absent:

I was away for five weeks in October and before I went I got a full draft of my entire thesis, as it was, together and I gave each supervisor, hoping at least one of them would look at it, and that was my strategy for when I came back being able to get straight back into the work, and neither of them had time to look at it. ... And I don’t blame X for that at all but I was really disappointed, but I think I probably should have been clearer about why I wanted for them to look at it and what I was looking for. And so that disappointment was mainly to do with them, so I didn’t talk to them for a while after that, like a week because I was so angry and I did this and they really let me down. But still, that was an unrealistic expectation I think. So now [my expectations are] more realistic and I’m very clear about what I want and it helps me as well because I know what I want. And then I’m not so disappointed … (Student K, I/V3, Q11: 28)

Quite legitimately this student was upset when her practical needs were unmet. But as a result she learned to adjust her expectations and assert what she needed. In the third instance cited here, the student’s desire to be endorsed as a promising scholar meant managing the emotional impact of feedback and using it as motivation to reach her next objective. Student K explained:

I think part of me is always a little apprehensive [about receiving feedback] ... But part of me also looks forward to receiving the feedback, because in particular from X, I know that it’s going to be constructive. And so it’s almost always if not always going to be a motivation to move on, like it’s yes I’ve reached this goal, and this is going to provide me with the stepping stones to reach the next goal. (Student D, Post-meeting I/V2, Q16: 91-93)
Students’ emotional investment in their work as authors thus influences how they perceive and work with feedback. In this respect we hear students speaking about feeling: “caution and excitement”, “comforted and reassured”, “relieved and delighted”. The need for reassurance, and the importance attached to the supervisor’s voice, was expressed by the student who said:

And there is always a niggling thing in the back of my mind that what I’ll write will be, regardless of the fact that I’m doing a PhD ... I’m still not worthy of being here. And having somebody in that position say that the quality is actually very good, and these are problems that anybody would have, so let’s work it out kind of thing. But very relieved, very, very relieved. (Student D, Post-meeting I/V2, Q16: 91)

Conversely, on a number of occasions students emphasised they had to learn to detach/disinvest from the feedback in order to keep emotions in check and allow time to think things over:

So you go through this initial phase of kind of devastation if you like, but then you put that emotion aside and a day or maybe a week later you go back through [the draft] after you’ve maybe made the changes or you actually look for the meaning in the comments and you can actually synthesise and stuff. Because there’s so much emotion involved you can’t do that straight away. (Student K, I/V3, Q5: 15)

Student K went on to comment on how she managed this process and retained a sense of her own authority. Her strategies included self-discipline, waiting, not reacting in front of the supervisor, and thinking like a supervisor. More broadly her words suggest that a disciplined and careful examination of one’s writing helped her authorise her own work:
So some things that maybe my supervisor says about a previous chapter, like moving things around, have made me feel really frustrated. ... And then in the next draft I had to move it back ... And I sort of felt: “You just don’t understand how much agony you’ve put me through”. ... But I didn’t say the depth of how I felt about it at the time because there wasn’t really any point because it’s to do with an emotional issue, not really the supervisor’s issue, it’s mine, and I appreciate the comments. But now I’m a lot more strict about, if I disagree with something I just won’t do it. But if there’s a comment that I disagree with I quite often go through it and say: “Well why did I disagree with it?” and “Why did the supervisor think that?” And then, if it means it’s because the paragraph doesn’t make any sense or as much sense where it is, I’ll re-work the paragraph first and then hand it in again. And then that solves the whole problem. It kind of shortcuts the whole ... it’s just being a bit more active I think for me about my writing and also a bit more critical myself. (Student K, I/V3, Q5: 15)

Supervisor desires and authorising strategies

Of course desire is not a one-sided matter. Desires on the part of the supervisor to be a ‘good’ (loved, respected, knowledgeable, etc.) supervisor also mediate the supervisory process. In their recent work, Grant (2001) and Lee and Williams (1999) among others have discussed the issue of desire in supervision. Grant (2001) argues that in education, the “clean term” for desire is “motivation” which endorses supervision of the student’s intellectual work (emphasis in original, p. 15). The trouble is that “in this clean framework of supervision ... the unreasonable elements that constitute supervision are rendered unspeakable” (Grant, 2001: 17). Against this, she proposes that it is vital for an ethical pedagogy to acknowledge bodies and emotions because “supervision is a process that engages both the supervisor

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42 Jennifer Gore (1992) makes the point that the use of the word ethical in Foucault’s work implies “one’s relation to oneself” not the everyday day meaning of which conjoins ethics with morality. She states that: critical pedagogy discourses “rarely address ways in which teachers, students and theorists themselves need to style or discipline their gestures, postures or attitudes.” (p. 67)
and the student as whole (complex and contradictory) persons” (Grant, 2001: 23).

The supervisors in this study did not work solely with questions of intellect but recognised students’ emotions in terms of how they impacted on the progress of the thesis and their acceptance/rejection of the feedback. Providing emotional support was a widely endorsed strategy. Supervisors’ own emotions were also, if obliquely, acknowledged in relation to their investments in the student’s work and the supervisory relationship.

**Balancing the intellectual and the personal**

As Grant (2005b) suggests, in supervision there may be “unexpected reactions (thoughts and emotions) [which] surface and complicate the relation for either supervisor or student or both” (Grant, 2005b: 12). In commenting on this and related matters, the supervisors in this study recognised emotion as imbricated with the intellectual. They recognised that being supervised while being authorised can make students feel unsettled and disoriented. A widely used strategy for dealing with this was to hail the student as knowledgeable, emphasising the ‘good’ parts of their work, thus validating the student’s growing expertise and enabling them to be autonomous (and take authorship and assert). Supervisor Q describes this process:

Yes, well explicitly I’m saying: “This is your thesis, you’ve gotta make up [your own mind]”, and I just keep saying, every time I give them something back I say: “Take what you want of this, you’re the one who knows more about this than I do, you’ve read more books.” So I say this all the time. (Supervisor Q, Post-meeting I/V2, Q12: 49)

**Lessening attachments and investments**

In the previous examples, we have seen that what the supervisor does and says is highly significant. Reflecting on this, Simon (1995: 97) suggests that it is important for the supervisor “to acknowledge one’s eroticization, to realize one’s actions matter to students. Indeed to act responsibly in such a situation
may be to seek supportively to lessen the degree of cathexis.” (p. 99) In following such a path, the supervisor needs to confer on students a sense of themselves as a scholar and reinforce their sense of commitment. Decathexis is important for being able to finish:

Expressions of nausea ("I’m sick to death of it!"), boredom, or disinterest which appear near the end of the project can be read as very positive signs that the writer has completed the creative process, they’ve done their positing and positioning, and are becoming detached from the passion that animated [the] previous stage of this quest to find their ‘own voice’ in their ‘own work’. This stage of detachment is vital for the completion phase. (Sofoulis, 1997: 16)

In the early stages of candidature, some supervisors consider the student’s gender, class background, levels of confidence, or emotional state as factors able to disorient students’ sense of entitlement, belonging, or self-confidence. In attempting to disrupt them supervisors may employ different authorising strategies. They may, for example, incite the desire for the student to change the restrictive parameters of their field of study and encourage students to find their voice (e.g. along social justice or feminist lines). This strategy encourages the student to join “a discursive environment in which one feels intellectually and emotionally at home” (Simon, 1995: 99).

Developing students’ confidence was a priority for the supervisors in this study. There were different approaches to this. For example, Supervisor M explained why he thought continual affirmatory feedback was necessary for women students:

My main sense is that for women finding a voice and feeling authorised to speak through that voice is usually more difficult than it is for men. You have to be more careful I think not to crush or diminish that voice. ... With the constructions of femininity and the way women get treated, becoming devoiced, losing their voice is a constant process. The whole
point of writing is to ... find a voice and believe in that voice. I suppose one has to be more careful with women not to allow them to feel devalued or silenced. (Supervisor M, Post-meeting I/V2, Q5: 11)

Another important concern for supervisors was avoiding the situation in which they cloned students “out of a narcissistic desire to create disciples” (Sofoulis, 1997: 16). Supervisor Q consciously authorises her students by limiting her expertise. Here she emphasised that:

You’ve got to be intellectually familiar with the field but you should not think you’re an expert in the field. And if you do you are just going to create a clone or destroy the person or ... it’s not about your own ego. That’s really what I think. A lot in the academy is about academics’ egos. (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q18: 54)

Supervisor Q went on to comment on the process of supervisory withdrawal that occurs as the thesis progresses and the student becomes their own author:

Well, no I don’t think I do [create authority dependent students] because I see the end stages as my withdrawal ... I mean I read the stuff and I don’t keep debating the issue. Like they’ve worked out an argument and I recognise that if I was doing this work that I would have perhaps a different argument, maybe I think I might have the same but I’d probably have a different one. ... I see my role as facilitating them to develop their own argument and so I withdraw from it and it’s more and more their authority. (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q17: 53)

Supervisor F made a similar point when she talked about the importance of being aware of the student’s goals and assisting them in realising them. In this case her confidence in the particular student concerned (X) was a paramount consideration:
In X’s case, I think the primary impact I have is a confirmatory one. It’s about the clarity of what she’s writing and its sufficiency to carry the argument that she’s trying to make. Because I have absolute faith in her scholarship ... that she has done the work, ... that she has an argument that she is content with ... So ... my role is to ensure that the writing delivers the promise that she has for it. So it’s not about correcting, it is not about finding an argument for her to make, because I know that she does all those things. (Supervisor F, I/V3, Q5A: 17)

In the case of less competent students she urges the student to do further work and may use the reader’s/examiners’ needs to persuade them:

With some of my other postgrad students it is a different story. It is about trying to get them to drag out the argument. It is about trying to say to them: “You have an argument, but it’s not a very strong one, and it’s very easily unpicked. And you haven’t put the hard yards into the depth of that argument to be able to sell it to an intelligent reader, and you are putting yourself at risk, if you insist on pushing that particular argument through.” So again, different students with different kinds of issues, it will really depend on what that student is bringing to me, as to which kind of feedback role I have to kick into. (Supervisor F, I/V3, Q5A: 17)

Feelings of frustration and resolution affect supervisors as much as students. On this, compare the following two observations from Supervisor Q. The first relates to times when progress is slow and feedback ignored or lost; the second, to the successful end of the research:

I get a bit irritated. I don’t always show it. Well actually I think I probably do show it. If I find that looking at a second draft and I’m making the same comments as I made in the first draft. And I mean some students do actually lose your comments and you’ve got so much time invested in that. It’s not very often. (Supervisor Q, I/V1, Q3A: 96)
One of the joyous, absolutely joyous things is reading final drafts, like X’s final draft and just reading page after page where you’re picking up the odd word, you’re perhaps suggesting another topic sentence … Where basically there’s page after page after page where it’s their work and they’ve shifted it on one step further than you could ever have envisaged and there you’ve got X’s thesis. And you can recognise your own contribution in it, but it’s theirs. I have no desire to or no passion for [altering someone else’s draft]. In fact my joy is actually in thinking: “We’re there, break out the champagne!” Or I think we’re there and we’re there in every chapter except that one. (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q14: 48)

Managing emotions - modelling positive desires

When supervisors reflected on their own emotions, they tended to do so in a guarded sense - as matters that needed to be managed so excesses could be curtailed (such as hiding anger, frustration, or irritation). This was often positioned as being undertaken on behalf of the student, a tactic which, even if unconsciously, reinforces the asymmetrical relationship between supervisor and student (protector and protected). In comparison supervisors were more open about how they used the supervision meeting to provide the “collaborative space in which the functions of holding, encouragement and endorsement become quite central” (Sofoulis, 1997: 12). Here they modeled particular academic comportments and sanctioned particular student behaviours. Thus, for example, Supervisor F endeavours to make transparent the ‘performative’ elements of projecting a scholarly identity:

I have many conversations with my students about things like feeling confident, things about their writing process, things about what to do when you feel you can’t do it, a huge amount about the sense of oneself as a scholar and how you engender that and what are the kinds of tricks that I pull for myself [and] that they can try and pull themselves. And we have long conversations … about using writing as a tool. (Supervisor F, I/V1, Q2A: 62)
In the next excerpt Supervisor M reflects on an occasion in which he upset and de-authorised a student by throwing a draft of their work in the bin after he had read it. On his own account, his response to the student was mixed. On the one hand, he suggested that the student not “be too precious” and use the occasion as a learning process; on the other he recognised that he himself had made a mistake.

I had a student once. We sat down with his manuscript and worked through it and I threw it in the bin because he had a copy. I can’t remember what happened … we had a conversation about [the draft], we worked out what needed to be done with it. I obviously hadn’t put a lot of marks on it and it really disturbed him. He was really upset by it … he [came] back to me later on [to] say: “It was really bad for me when you did that”. I said: “Look, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean anything by it, but look let’s not be too precious about this thing.” We had a bit of a chat about how these things are serving purposes. They’re not a be all and end all, it’s not a life work. It’s a hoop, the PhD is more and more a hoop, and I think you have to be really careful not to overstate its significance in the broader scheme of things. But that was a mistake to do that to his manuscript. … it’s a strange psychological state to find yourself in when you’re doing a PhD. … It’s just a very delicate mental state you can find yourself in. You’ve got to do your best to be aware of that, but sometimes you aren’t. (Supervisor M, Post-meeting I/V2, Q11: 46)43

This next excerpt from the same supervisor highlights some further ambiguities in the authorisation process as far as his relations with his students are concerned:

43 Here the supervisor is impervious to his disinvestment in the student’s written text as he considers that it is the student’s psychological state that causes the problem and the student’s inability/reluctance to see the PhD as a hoop. He does concede he made a mistake yet he expects the student to be disengaged, which is easier said than done from a student position.
For some, in some respects [students] have constructed me in a certain position. I am someone to be feared or someone to be worried about ... At another level, they use me as a sort of, as a not quite a father figure, but a sort of authority person. When it comes to the PhD ... I’m approached in a particular way, so I have to understand that. And I know at a certain level it’s important that my criticisms are measured ... Part of what they’re really looking for from me is just ... permission.  (Supervisor M, I/V1, Q2A: 38-54)

The sensitive nature of supervisory relations and the importance of taking care of the text was also mentioned by Supervisor Q who recalled a time when a student “freaked out because I wrote on her text”:

[She] went absolutely feral about me marking ... writing on her manuscript and I ended up supervising her entirely leaving her manuscript totally alone. And then writing a separate sheet. So that it meant my comments couldn’t be anywhere near as directive in terms of grammar as I’d normally do. But it was a very useful corrective and since then I’ve become more suggestive in my approach and less directive, I think.  (Supervisor Q, I/V1, Q1B: 38-42)

These and previous comments illustrate the complexity and idiosyncrasy of the research process with its constant elements of authorisation and deauthorisation. Taken together they are suggestive of the ways in which supervision is experienced as:

a deeply affective relationship where the supervisor’s and student’s desires are implicated in ways that make the relationship potentially complicated and volatile: desires to please, to challenge, to do well, to demonstrate independence, to push towards independence, to resist, to be respected by, to be recognised as clever, to be told, to become like, to become authoritative, desires for the (powerful or vulnerable) other and towards the emergent thesis (emphasis in original, Grant, 2005b: 12).
And finally, the issue of authorisation is “not just going to be over when you hand this thing in” (Supervisor M, I/V3, Q10: 28). Instead, achieving the PhD “gives the initiate the power to offer statements of truth to ever-widening communities of scholars” (Howley & Hartnett, 1992: 280). On being certified with an intelligible academic identity, the authorised persona, deemed safe to pursue research autonomously, is subject to the judgement of peers. Feedback is practised differently and the requirement to seek help from superiors is replaced by the discipline of peer judgement which remains just as concerned with getting things ‘right’.

Balancing autonomy and authority

In the following section I suggest that the process of authorisation and knowledge formation gives rise to quasi-paradoxical situations. This involves students’ need to establish their own authority while at the same being subject to their supervisors’ feedback. While supervisors can use their authority over students to ‘encourage’ or ‘invite’ them to revise their texts and reconsider their ideas, students, who wish to retain control of their work must make their own decisions about how they will use their supervisors’ feedback.

For all the supervisors’ authority, students are in fact the final owners of their texts (but they may not be the final arbiters). The student can even submit the thesis without the supervisor’s approbation. The supervisor’s authority is challenged by the student’s freedom to reject their feedback. This “permanent provocation” (Foucault, 1994b: 342) of wills creates a dynamic in which power is continually circulating and being articulated through each party’s ability to act on the actions of the other.

Overall, the students in this study were very positive about the quality of the feedback offered; nonetheless, they used their supervisors’ comments judiciously and did not necessarily comply with them. In the following
excerpts (where students were answering a question about how they responded to the feedback) we see this prevarication:

I always act on all the suggestions I’m given but ‘act’ doesn’t necessarily mean put them in. Act may mean discuss them further with my supervisor, if I disagree or need clarification. (Student K, Post-meeting I/V2, Q13: 51)

Certainly I will act on argument, but I haven’t made up my mind about X’s structure … I would say most of them I would. (Student C, Post-meeting I/V2, Q13: 63)

No, I intend to think about them but I won’t necessarily act on them. But I suspect in this particular chapter I will act on most. (Student H, Post-meeting I/V2, Q13: 47)

No. I did not necessarily [act on all the suggestions] in the form they were given. There might have been suggestions from X about something here that’s been unclear, and she might suggest where are you going, what are you saying, or does this mean such and such? And it would alert me to a problem, but I wouldn’t necessarily take the suggestion. Grammatical - I defer to her in terms of grammar. (Student Y, Post-meeting I/V2, Q13: 85)

In expanding on this, Student H reflected on the occasions when the supervisor’s suggested change conflicts with her own take on things, especially toward the end stages:

I’m more able to weigh it up and think: “Well yes that could work, but I want to do it this way”. That’s only been one or two comments where I’ve thought: “No, I’m not going to do that”. No, “not going to do that” is wrong because there are never any directive comments, but well: “Yes,
but I can see it might work that way, but I want to work it this way”,
where X’s given me an alternative and I’ve sort of thought: “No, I’m not
going to do that”. (Student H, I/V3, Q13: 72)

In his turn, Student V was more prepared to refuse the supervisor’s suggestion
outright:

There are some things which I do and there are some things which I think
that X’s just being a bit pedantic I suppose, or there were some areas that
I just choose to quietly ignore. (Student V, Post-meeting I/V2, Q13: 29)

Student V went on to say:

I’ve challenged him on a few things. I suppose last year when he was
making changes, and they were changes to changes that he’d made
already, I suppose I started to challenge him with stuff like that. But since
then I don’t do it now, I’m just diplomatic I suppose and just take it on
board and do it. And there [are] also areas where he has suggested a
change and I’ve chosen to diplomatically ignore what he said. I don’t know
if he is aware that I’ve ignored it or not. (Student V, I/V3, Q4: 6)

Another reason why students may reject feedback is concern about the nature
of the supervisor’s response. In Student G’s case this was because she
doubted the integrity of the feedback from her secondary supervisor:

I’m not sure whether she’s being honest or whether she sort of feels that
she’s telling me what she feels she ought to tell me, rather than what she
wants to tell me. (Student G, I/V3, Q14: 49)

One student was very clear about her desire to limit the relationship and
specify the kind of feedback she required:
For me, there is too much at risk if it’s all honest and open. It’s damaging to compromise the relationship because of the power relations and the fact the student is reliant on the supervisor to endorse the readiness of the thesis for submission. The closest thing I can do to address this is to ask for specific feedback so I do this in different ways and I use this as a tactic. (Student G, I/V3, Q5: 21)

Supervisors are in a difficult position when it comes to getting students to make the changes they request. If they wrestle control away from the student they may create resentment or de-authorise the student. Nor can they actually physically take over the text (although I have heard of cases where supervisors do actually sit at the keyboard and write for students). Given, then, that supervisors cannot directly control students, they must wait as students make decisions about their texts and see what eventuates. As Grant (2005b) explains, this can be a volatile time:

[and so the student labours over the research while the supervisor is only able to listen, read and give feedback. Frustrations arise for the supervisor over the pace of the student’s work, over its quality, over the student’s ‘refusals’ to respond to feedback in ways the supervisor intended - or hoped - him [her] to. (p. 134)

In brief, all this suggests that students are not powerless before their supervisors. As Donald (1992) observes “the paradox remains ... that a degree of autonomous agency is a precondition of pastoral modes of power” (p. 13). In other words, freedom is immanent in power relations and “there are no relations of power without resistances” (Foucault, 1980d: 142). Students exercise the liberty available to them by accepting, modifying, or rejecting their supervisor’s feedback while still operating within particular constraints. While their desire for approval and sense of responsibility encourages them to comply with supervisory requests, they also learn to work with and work around their supervisors so they can have the final say on their texts.
The emotional impacts of assessment, judgement and authorisation

Grant (2005b) notes that anxiety “infuses supervision in unpredictable ways and plays out around the process of choosing examiners and the thesis being examined” (p. 136). In this study, the responses relating to examination, and questions of judgement more broadly, suggested that the authorisation process is marked by negative and demoralising experiences as much as by pleasurable and affirmatory ones.

The supervisors were sensitive about the potential for their feedback to demoralise students, and learned to develop strategies to soften the effects of their criticism. In the words of Supervisor B:

It didn’t occur to me at the beginning with my supervision, but it gradually did, that some students felt extremely uncomfortable about the written feedback. I know one particular student who was then doing her [Master’s] with me when I gave her the first … draft back of something she’d written and with my comments all over it. She said later that she showed it to her [spouse] and [who] said (in a serious voice): “Well you might as well just give up then.” … So although she maintained a bright face, … she was obviously … really concerned about that. (Supervisor B, I/V1, Q3A: 122-125)

This supervisor proceeded to elaborate on how she educated students about the whole process of writing/criticism/re-writing. As well as using her own writing process to reassure them and normalise matters, Supervisor B also talked about the tendency for students (and all authors) to read the feedback as a judgement of their personal worth, rather than as an appraisal of the precision of a particular piece of work. This conflation of the ‘personal’ and the ‘academic’ is rendered the more likely in the context of an ethos that
emphasises human development. As subjects tied to their ‘true’ selves, students are committed to self-improvement and this may make it the more difficult to separate the supervisor’s critical stance from the personal domain.

Complicating matters further is the elusive quality of ‘trust’. This may become, particularly acute in the end stages when a student is so close to their own work that they are unable to judge its quality and must therefore trust the supervisor’s judgements on its readiness. This highlights “the asymmetry of dependent trust required from the guided towards the guide” (Grant, 2005b: 341). In commenting on this Supervisor F said:

I often find with my students ... that towards the end of the process, and I think it's probably just a feature of the “end game”, there comes the point that they just simply have to trust me that it’s good enough, or that it’s very good, or whatever. ... Because they are so intimately connected with what they’re doing and they are so familiar with it, they lose the ability to get a sense about how worthwhile or otherwise it might be ... (Supervisor F, I/V3, Q4: 8)

She went on to say that:

When we are not feeling authoritative about our work, when we are reliant upon others to make the judgement for ourselves it’s very easy then to describe that uneasiness in the gut as being failure, as being incapacity, as being stupidity, all of those kinds of things. And it’s not. (Supervisor F, I/V3, Q4: 10)

There are, though, real limits to the supervisor’s ability to protect the student from the sense of personal failure a negative examiner’s report may trigger. This was strikingly illustrated by Supervisor F’s account of a student who received one negative examiner’s report:
But a recent student has had ... two very good reports and one negative report. And of course, two weeks of agony with her ... because all she could think of was the negative one. She [could] not think about the positive reports at all ... Now fortunately, on that one, the judgement by the committee was ... on the side of the student. ... But there were two weeks where she was thinking ... “I’m stupid, I’m stupid, I can’t possibly get this, I don’t deserve a PhD.” (Supervisor F, I/V1, Q3B: 127)

For all the supervisor’s care, the student is ultimately alone when it comes to survival and academic identity. In a system in which high value is placed on individual choice and autonomy, the associated qualities of self-responsibility and stoicism are particularly important when strong criticism or negative judgements from examiners are received. The following excerpt, again from Supervisor F, illustrates how she prepares students for the examination well before the thesis is submitted. In this case, there is an explicit emphasis on self-protection so that the student can feel confident in her own scholarship despite criticism:

Yeah, it is a gamble and again the best defence against that gamble is to take responsibility for themselves ... for your own scholarship as a student. But if that fundamental process isn’t nurtured in the supervisory relationship then what are you supposed to do? Invent it out of thin air? Breathe it in? How do you do that without somebody actually putting you in that context where that is the expectation for what you will do? How do you do it all by yourself? Some people do ... but it’s a rare beast who can do it. (Supervisor F, I/V1, Q3B: 131)

Negative examiners’ criticisms may also be experienced by supervisors as a comment on their own ability. According to Ballard (1996), the feeling that examiners’ reports are in some sense addressed to supervisors is especially prevalent when a student’s thesis is negatively criticised or praised for its originality. In reflecting on this Supervisor F acknowledged that: “Negative examiners’ reports are ... I think as much a judgement of the supervisor as the student. You feel them as self-criticism.” (Supervisor F, I/V1, Q3B: 127)
As noted in the opening chapter to this thesis, Judith Brett (1991) asserts that gaining academic authority is by its nature provisional and the academic project forever unfinished. The comments of students and supervisors lend weight to this. This is not necessarily a negative and I suggest that that this lack of final endorsement may be “a necessary aspect of ‘knowing’, a thread ... that prevents knowing from becoming monolithic and tyrannical” (Grant, 2005b: 127).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that feedback is formative of students’ capacities as authors and produces the meanings by which students apprehend themselves as particular kinds of authoritative knowers. I have also suggested that students’ sense of authorship is not just about being confident of content or even of being certain about themselves, but also encompasses their relations with their supervisor. The nexus between knowledge production, power, desire, text and identity bring to mind Foucault’s observation that there is a:

complex exchange and circulation of sins and merits. The sheep’s sin is also imputable to the shepherd. He’ll [sic] have to render an account of it at the Final Judgment. Conversely, by helping his flock to find salvation, the shepherd will also find his own. But by saving his sheep, he lays himself open to getting lost; so if he wants to save himself, he must run the risk of losing himself for others. If he does get lost, it is the flock that will incur the greatest danger. (Foucault, 1994e: 308)

In exchange for an individualised pedagogy, the student is ‘invited’ to take responsibility for the thesis. With the acts designed to bring the student’s subjectivities as author into being performed over and again within the regulatory context of supervision, there is more to the feedback process than
just evaluative moments or personal exchanges. In “What is an author?” Foucault (1984a: 120) asks: “What difference does it make who is speaking?” My data suggests that for these emergent authors a lot depends on who is speaking; a lot hangs on being authorised to speak qua academic.

The issues I have discussed raise important questions about the relationship between student, supervisor and text in a given institutional context. Could it be that while students are undergoing the process of authorisation they are coming to be authorities with a masculinist sense of autonomous authority and this production “instantiates the intentions of the institutional relations of ruling (D. E. Smith, 1999)” (Alexander, 2005: 10). Or, as the responses of some of the supervisors and students cited here in fact suggest, are they able to have at least some control of their text, what it contains, how it argues, reflects and produces knowledge? Even on this more optimistic reading, there is a risk, recognised by the participants, that the academic norms students internalise through supervision may be experienced as the only or best way of creating academic products and conducting relations. In commenting how to counteract this, Johnson et al., (2000) state that the “autonomy sought of the student” needs to be:

... recognised as a set of capacities, a mode of conducting oneself, that can be learned - and taught - rather than a capacity which already exists in the individual and has to be revealed in order for him or her to be or become the successful PhD candidate. (p. 145)

My discussion has been underpinned by the assumption that the power relations between student and supervisor, while asymmetrical, are best understood as the outcome of social actors negotiating actions which have a chain-like effect on each other’s interactions (Foucault, 1994b: 340). As such, students and supervisors generate “a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions” (Foucault, 1994b: 340). Such a formulation captures the productive and problematic aspects of power relations in supervision (Grant, 2005b). This means that providing feedback can be a
volatile exercise, for dialogue draws student and supervisor into a tangle of decisions about text, identity, knowledge, truth and authority. On the one hand, this process is marked by a relatively stable order of power relations, and strict conventions of knowledge production. On the other, it is marked by chance and unstable power relations (insofar that students make decisions about how they will use their supervisors’ feedback), anomaly (in that supervisors may misread students), and rupture (in that students may undergo an abrupt or unstable transition to a newly constituted self).

Finally, following Grant (2005b), I have suggested that “relations of domination and subordination may well be necessary and productively implicated in the process of coming to know” (pp. 217-218). Students in this study spoke equally of the satisfactions and apprehension in developing their work, suggesting that this combination may be a core factor in bringing their work together.
Chapter 7

Under offer: Supervisors’ invitational practices

a female graduate student:
I think [autonomy] is an essential expectation because if you didn’t have that at the end of it you’d be questioning whether it was your work, and you would never actually have to go through that kind of crisis of self-confidence in your own research and understanding what you’re capable of and being proud of something at the end that’s yours. I think it’s a reasonable expectation if it is understood that this is more like a traineeship, or that you have to have support from supervisors to encourage you and to help you over your really big hills. ... Then, it’s just growth. Just growth. Well! Well, I don’t know. It’s a really hard question.

(Student K, I/V3: Q7: 23)

a female supervisor:
I expect my students to shape the agenda around meetings. I expect them to come in with their issues and questions. I don’t expect to have to set up some kind of exam or test to see what they’ve been doing. I will repeatedly, boringly probably, reiterate again and again and again: “I am just an intelligent reader, this is how I read it, you take from this what you think works for you. It is your choice, it is your decision, it is your thesis. You must be happy with the decisions that you are taking, my role is to give you advice.” So I constantly do that kind of talk that reminds them all the time that they are not there to get a tick from me, or a gold seal of approval or whatever, and then it’s done. And you know often we will be working at cross purposes, students will say: “I can’t submit this”. And I’ll say: “Oh, yes you can. It’s fine.” Their doubt is fairly acute on occasions.

(Supervisor F, I/V3, Q17: 91)
Introduction

The supervision mandate includes urging students to do their own thinking. This authorising talk, which directs students to take charge of their decisions carries distinctive (mostly tacit) protocols. In reference to this, this chapter introduces and explores the notion of ‘under offering’ by which supervisors’ feedback assumes an invitational rather than a directive character. My discussion maps the strategies supervisors use to ‘offer’ their feedback and influence the outcome - so that the student, in the words of Supervisor Q, can “accept, modify, reject, or move beyond” the feedback. In making this mode of interpellation my focus, I attempt to understand how supervisory power is exercised to bring about students’ co-operation and influence their choices. Through highlighting the problematic and productive nature of the dual tasks of protecting and disciplining, I propose that the strategy of ‘under offering’ makes certain decisions on the part of students more likely than others.

Students’ voices are not generally heard in this chapter (except in being echoed via supervisors’ accounts and in Student K’s excerpt above and to follow and in the concluding section). They will be heard again in Chapter 8 as students speak back to suggest why they experience difficulties challenging their supervisors’ authority and in taking up their supervisors’ offers.

Conditional’ offers and ‘obliged’ acceptances?

“Under offer” evokes the idea that students are being made an offer to take up their supervisors’ feedback invitationally. The phrase alludes to the transfer of property and the practice of bidding for proprietorial rights of ownership. For example, when a house is ‘under offer’ we see that the manner in which the negotiations play out, and the process in which the acceptance/refusal entails particular behaviours and protocols of interest,

44 Thanks to Kathryn Choules for suggesting this title when I brainstormed options with the “Women Writing Away” group in September (2004).
disinterest, and guesswork from both parties in order to determine how best to ‘clinch the deal’. In supervision, the practice of ‘under offering’ also involves supervisors *distancing* themselves from some of the attributes of their position (enforcer of the canon, arbiter of students’ texts for example). At the same time, students are obligated to take up ‘the offer’ in certain ways. The expectation of acceptance is un(der)stated in that the ‘right’ choice needs to be made for students to achieve disciplinary success. It is through the practice of ‘under offering’, I suggest, that supervisors’ power is brought into play unobtrusively, shaping the nature of students’ decisions and the directions taken. I also propose that when supervisors present their comments as ‘conditional offers’ it makes it more difficult for supervisors’ professional knowledges to be contradicted or resisted.

The term ‘under offering’ thus signals how supervisors’ persuasive encouragements seek to induce agreement while also strengthening students’ sense of self/authorship. Its effects are thus both empowering and regulatory. Particularly given the tactic of ‘standing back’, the gradual emergence of the thesis text also involves a high degree of uncertainty given the relatively open dialogue between student and supervisor. But, as Grant (2005b) suggests, this dialogue is always/already anchored in the disciplinary traditions to which the thesis belongs:

In supervision the “becoming topic” that provides the rationale for the supervisor and student being in dialogue is the thesis topic. This topic belongs to its discipline (or disciplines) more than it belongs to any individual supervisor or student, although through the research and supervision processes it may come to belong to them - ideally, the student - more and more. (p. 183)

The importance of the topic belonging to the student is echoed by Supervisor F. She also explicitly links this with the importance of the supervisor (who remains positioned as the expert) restraining herself and standing back:
Because it never works giving them the words to put in. If they can’t take an idea, remake it as their own, they can’t speak it with authority. And it’s blindingly obvious on the page and they don’t understand what they’re saying. So it just doesn’t work to rewrite somebody’s words for them. So there are moments in feedback … with some other students where I think I’ve obviously made the point several times, they’re not gonna get it, it’s not how they see it, let it go. (Supervisor F, I/V3, Q11: 66)

In my ensuing analysis of the explicit and pervasive cueing of ownership and autonomy, I aim to develop a further understanding of the power dynamics at work in student-supervisor relations. This time my focus is on how relational power is exercised by limiting the field of possible actions and how supervisors create “conditions that virtually require individuals to make the choices that lead to their improvement (salvation)” (Howley & Hartnett, 1992: 272). In essence, the ‘freedom’ to choose is circumscribed by a limited field of possibilities. However, when students are invited to decide, the locus of decision-making appears to “originate from within the person” (John, 1990: 126), thus masking the power relations at work. In other words, in configuring offers “through regulated acts of choice” (Rose, 1996: 98), the disciplinary work of the supervisor is concealed. The effect of this concealment makes it seem as if the decisions are made ‘freely’. Following Foucault, we can say that the supervisor’s ‘offers’ are more likely to be accepted to the extent that their source is hidden and they appear as the impersonal voice of “universal disinterestedness” (Foucault, 1976a, 1979), (Howley & Hartnett, 1992: 276).

In the discussion I will refer to two distinct mechanisms (or transfer points) in supervisors’ invitational strategies. These relate to (a) conformity to the conventions of the canon and (b) the endorsement of autonomy. These two notions are drawn from Howley and Hartnett’s (1992) analysis. My suggestion is that these mechanisms amplify the student’s capacities – as author, as textual owner, as knowledge producer, as self-knowing and autonomous, as literate, pedagogic and disciplinary subject – while producing their consent
without explicit coercion. Relevant here is Usher et al.’s, (1997) point that empowerment involves:

a deliberate ambiguity of meaning that highlights the co-implication and entanglement of power with control. The point about these terms is that they have, simultaneously, an active and a passive sense, the sense of being a subject and of being subjected, of a body of systematic knowledge and of a system of regulation and control, of being authorised and of knowing and affirming oneself. (p. 83)

Similarly, Kendall (2002) suggests that the process of “responsibilisation”, through which candidates “develop their own practical strategies for motivation, organisation, and so forth” (p. 136), means that students have to accept responsibility for their texts and ultimately for their own success or failure. Given this, students who feel they haven’t measured up or ‘got it’ may judge themselves to be inadequate, incompetent, indecisive, or ‘needy’. Supervisory practices, particularly given their invitational character, can “impinge closely on feelings of self-worth, producing a sense of inadequacy in those who have absorbed expert knowledge and judge themselves deficient in relation to it” (Harris, 1994: 76). This is all the more so given that the discourses surrounding ‘authorship’ involve the complex processes of subjectivation alluded to throughout this thesis.

In the following account I make a distinction between three different dimensions of ‘choice’ in the ‘under offering’ repertoire: (1) a ‘free’ (apparently ‘unconditional’) choice, (2) a negotiated (more clearly ‘conditional’) choice, and (3) a visibly constrained choice. These three dimensions are discussed in relation to the beginning, middle and end stages of candidature. In this respect I am depicting the early stages of candidature as characterised by establishing the student-supervisor relationship and

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45 Subjectivation refers to the ways subjects constitute themselves “through practices that are basically related to power and knowledge (Foucault, 1987: 10). Simola et al., (1998) identify three techniques of subjectivation: “modes of subjectivation, will to knowledge, and art of governmentality” (p. 66).
promoting autonomy; the middle stages by the assessment of the text and the revision of chapters, and the end stages with finalising the thesis and preparing it for examination. My discussion also considers how in each case the strategy of ‘under offering’ favours the canon over ownership/autonomy or integrates the two.

**Beginning stages**

My data suggests that in the beginning phases of the research an ‘open’ invitational form of choice is the most common of the three dimensions. The negotiated or ‘conditional’ form (typically offered in relation to work that has been submitted for comment) is not particularly evident at this stage, and the ‘constrained’ version, in which supervisors put clear limits on students, is, as we shall see, only explicit when it comes to ensuring the feasibility of the project. In contrast, ‘free’ choice is emphasised as a means of reinforcing students’ sense of ownership and autonomy. In the following example, Supervisor F emphasises her non-directive voice and foregrounds the student’s decision-making:

> So right from the beginning of the relationship with X, she’s understood that I’m there to act as a sounding board for her, that I am not there to provide direction, but I am there to respond and react, and make suggestions, and nut out problems with her and stuff like that. … I don’t issue instructions to X - we have conversations. ... And in that process you begin to refine what the idea is and to work together. ... But simply because the bulk of the work is done by the postgraduate, the prospect for the thesis to be hers emerges in that space. (Supervisor F, I/V3, Q1: 1)

Supervisor Q talked similarly about the importance of motivation particularly in relation to getting students through the long haul of the PhD. In her view this stance also reduced the risk of supervisors taking over the research and undermining the student’s sense of ownership:
I mean four years doing a PhD is a *long* haul, very traumatic in a lot of ways and I just don’t think it’s going to be worth it for a student unless they take the initiative right from the beginning. So I suggest topic areas but I would never suggest a specific topic. Yes otherwise I think also you become as the supervisor, too personally responsible for this thesis if it right from the very beginning becomes too much your thesis and not enough theirs. (Supervisor Q, I/V1, Q1B: 52-54)

There was also a sense that if students were sufficiently motivated - had themselves really understood what they were attempting to say - that they would make the ‘right’ choices as far as wider canonical traditions are concerned. Hence, Supervisor M was insistent that supervisors should “always get [students] to choose and recognise their motivations, their interests, what they want to do, what they want to say, who they want to be” (Supervisor M, I/V3, Q18: 52). In the post-supervisory meeting he expanded on his reluctance to direct - or ‘over’ offer - by saying:

In a sense, I try not to make suggestions by giving the space in a sense and some encouragement to accept the reality of that disturbing set of infinite possibilities. Some of the possibilities that can often be really difficult to deal with. But it’s also a case of trying to encourage them to recognise that at certain points you make a decision and stick with it. Which is why it’s so important to make the right decision. (Supervisor M, Post-meeting I/V2, Q8: 27)

Further:

Sometimes people want to ask you: “Can I say this?” or “Can I do this?” or “Is this okay?” and they want validation, and in a sense my view is you’ve got to provide that yourself as a writer. You have to every now and then say to yourself: “Yes, it’s this”. Be critical, but deliver it and just do it. (Supervisor M, Post-meeting I/V2, Q6: 14)
This practice of standing back, ‘under offering’, involved him in pushing a diffident student to stop asking for ‘permission’:

... asking for permission is our standard joke. She still does it: “I know I’m asking permission, but ... can I do this?” And then I laugh about it and then we say: “Well can you?” And then she has to give herself the answer to those sorts of questions. So in the written stuff it’s about intellectual engagement, about trying to reinforce the intellectual qualities.
(Supervisor M, I/V3, Q5A: 13)

As indicated there was little evidence of supervisors limiting the scope of students’ projects and this was particularly the case in these early stages. This may be an artefact of the interview and associated with the tendency for supervisors to speak more eagerly of their enabling roles rather than disciplinary roles, as I have suggested in previous chapters. Yet the data does indicate that supervisors could seek to quite strictly constrain the student’s choices to ensure the feasibility of the project within the time limits. Even more so, he or she may elect to withdraw from the supervision arrangement if the student refuses to comply:

In one instance I was a co-supervisor on a project ... and I was trying to say: “Look, I don’t know where this is going and I’ve got some issues that aren’t being addressed. I need to know that relatively quickly.” ... so I said: “Look, I’m more than happy to walk away from this one” ... It’s very much that issue of whether people wish to commit to that process that I bring to it. (Supervisor M, I/V1, Q3A: 110-116)

Middle stages

If establishing a relationship between student and supervisor is paramount in the early stages of the research, the middle stages are marked by the
importance of the triangular relationship between supervisor, text and student. And while the ‘offers’ of supervisors include all of the three dimensions of choice it is the second layer of negotiated or conditional choice that is paramount at this stage.

Taking the dimension of ‘free’ choice first, we find Supervisor J identifying certain things for consideration yet promoting the feeling that the student is autonomous:

[To make my considerations explicit] [t]he only thing I do is put question marks (meaning I’m not certain myself about this but you may want to think about it), or say this is stylistic on my part, and that the student can decide whether they want to do this or not. I also give choices of whether they want to do this or that. So this gives the feeling that the student has to exercise her independence. (Supervisor J, Post-meeting I/V2, Q12: 12)

In a similar fashion Supervisor M talked about his strategy of offering ‘suggestive’ feedback:

Even if I make a change it’s a suggestion so if I say I’ve made some suggestions and every time I read my own work I want to fiddle with something. There is always the possibility of saying something better but it’s always a suggestion, so if they don’t want to go with it that doesn’t bother me that much. (Supervisor M, Post-meeting I/V2, Q11: 44)

In the following excerpt we see Supervisor M restricting his duties to that of a sounding board so as to leave the student in control of the text. In his style of feedback, possibilities are provided (including anticipated problems with writing style), and a reader response (“this is how I reacted to it”), rather than directives.
I guess I see myself as an adviser. The project is the student’s project. They’re responsible and in control of it and I am there as a sounding board, ... where they can throw up issues, ideas, questions, problems. ... The text is their text. Even when there were problems, when I had issues with the writing style, I had to say: “Look if you want to write this way, that’s fine, I think we’ll have all these problems. This is how I reacted to it.” But in some ways, I leave them in control of it, so talking ... I see is a better way to make clear the fact that I’m not producing text or I’m not making the text into anything. I’m talking to them about the possibilities for their texts. (Supervisor M, I/V1, Q2B: 90-92)

From these excerpts we get the sense that supervisors tried to facilitate an environment where students “experience[d] themselves as in control, as the author of their intentions, as exercising free will and independence” (Johnson et al., 2000: 142). This may be particularly important when the supervisor herself is known to be a particular expert in the student’s field. This was articulated by Supervisor F when she commented that:

You’ve really got to let them come up with their thesis ... and put it in a way which makes sense and I’m very conscious of that, ... especially students that are work[ing] on fields that I’m very familiar with and that I write on myself. I would argue it this way, but they can’t argue it this way. ... And so there’s a sense that I might speak to them this way, but I don’t have any expectations that they will replicate or clone the argument that I make. They have to find the way of putting it in their own words, so that they have that deep sense of this makes sense. (Supervisor F, I/V1, Q5/3A: 77)

In these middle stages of candidature, though, it was the dimension of ‘negotiated’ or ‘conditional’ choice that was paramount. Here supervisors invited students’ decisions, but with the proviso that their own feedback was considered. While they usually anticipated or hoped for a positive response, they implicitly or explicitly attached conditions to the feedback. In this group
of responses the canon and autonomy are positioned so that they mutually reinforcing. Given that the canonical tradition relies on student’s capacity to choose actions that are ‘good’ for them, ‘offering’ operates by these choices being made with the help of the supervisors’ guiding hand.

The following excerpt from Supervisor B provides a clear sense of how students’ capacity to make the ‘right’ choice is carefully elicited:

So, what I try to [do] in a piece of analysis is say: “Do you think it would be useful if you did this and this?” And then I would say to the student: “Would you be happy with that?” And often the student would say: “Yeah that’s fine”. They do that and then they come back and say: “And I’ve also included this” and I’ll say: “That’s great”. To me that sort of interaction with both contributing is really good and that I think is the best thing that one can do. (Supervisor B, Post-meeting I/V2, Q12: 16)

The negotiated nature of these choices is also evident in this supervisor’s suggestion that ‘you wouldn’t want a person to be totally independent and autonomous. I can think of at least two of my students who actually are quite far down that line’. The related tensions between the supervisors’ obligation to defend the canon and students’ right to express their view of things can be seen as an integral part of the supervision process. This was recognised by the supervisors in this study who mentioned different ways of dealing with it. One important strategy involved both parties compromising in some way. In responding to a question about how the supervisor deals with a text that needs sections deleted and how this impacts on the supervisory relationship, Supervisor Q commented:

In terms of their work versus your power, is that what you mean? I guess the problem comes if the student is intent on holding onto sections that you can’t see the logic of and they really can’t see what you’re trying to say. Sometimes students say to me, especially mature aged students: “Look I know you really don’t like this section, but I’m leaving it in again
because I really think it’s important”. And then I might recognise the importance in a way I didn’t before, or I might say: “I still can’t see the importance of this”. Usually, I guess we arrive at some sort of compromise in that situation where the person edits back. But in the end, I always say to them, every time I give a draft back I say: “Look these are just comments and this is your thesis”. And all the way through I say: “This is your thesis, this is your thesis, this is your thesis”. (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q14: 45)

In the manner of Supervisor Q, supervisors were generally cautious as far as insisting on deletions was concerned. Supervisor M explained that when deletions were required due to length issues, he negotiates with the student, expresses his reservations and ‘encourages’ agreement. With this strategy he tries to hold back so that eventually the student makes a ‘free’ choice:

I would be very reluctant [to delete sections of text] if we are encountering problems of length. Well how I handle it is that in the first instance we try and work out more or less how big certain parts are going to be. So we’ve got some sort of general figure that we’re working with. So, really what I’m hoping is that they start to think: “Ah this is a bit long”. They start to think about where it might be cut, how it might be cut. And I’ll more or less support them. … Encourage them to agree with me sort of thing to see the same things as I do. (Supervisor M, I/V3, Q12A: 36)

If the student doesn’t take the hint then Supervisor M uses a questioning technique rather than direct sanctions:

In the end, I suppose what I find myself doing is, and it is intervention I suppose, it’s sort of like: “Do you really have to do this?” “Is this really absolutely necessary?” I’ve tried to talk to them beforehand to get clear that all the things that they’ve been doing are necessary and it doesn’t stop them going on and doing extra stuff. … Basically just keep asking the question: “Is it necessary?”, until you put doubts in their mind as to
whether it’s necessary or not. And then you hope that the next time you encounter them they are starting to come to the view that it’s not necessary and you encourage that. So it’s sort of devious I guess. By saying: “This has to go” ... Phew, I don’t think I could say that. (Supervisor M, I/V3, Q13: 40)

When there were disagreements most supervisors avoided direct confrontation. Instead they would either express their reservations and leave it at that, or wait for the student to change their mind. Supervisor M shed light on his own strategies when he spoke about his experience with a student (W) who was behind his expected submission date:

[It’s not my role to] instigate [the finishing of the thesis]. … we together … have talked about submission dates, deadlines, when things need to be finished. And I’ve got one that’s now overdue by about a year now. He’s working, crunching away at it and I’m reasonably confident that we will have to enter end game some time next year. I’ve seen enough of it that and I’m happy with the level of how it’s going. But this was a student who got distracted by other tangents and who had to read this other literature, and had to do this other stuff. I kept saying to him: “But I don’t see why, I don’t think it’s a good idea personally”. “No I must [names supervisor]!!” “OK. It’s your project. I’ve said what I had to say.” Later on we discussed the fact that: “Yes, it was a tangent, and yes, I did waste six months and yes …” But you know that’s part of it, isn’t it? That’s what you learn. (Supervisor M, I/V1, Q2B: 144)

Supervisor J’s strategy was to provide options rather than prescriptions and let the student take ownership and decide:

I think it’s not saying: “Well you definitely have to do it this way.” But it’s saying: “Have you thought about a different organisation? Or have you thought about splitting these into two chapters?” And often the person has actually thought about that. Or it’s deeply embedded and then it comes out, and she says: “Well yeah, maybe that is what I need to do!” And I
think that ... you see that there are many different ways that you can structure a thesis. And that there’s no one right way and it’s almost trying to feel, what is the right way for this person? (Supervisor J, I/V3, Q1: 1)

A strategy often used by supervisors was requiring that students at least critically engage with their feedback and make a decision on the basis of a considered response. Thus, in the following excerpt, the supervisor outlines her expectations concerning students’ use of her feedback. She accepts four possible responses but does expect a response:

Same as ever - to read it all again as soon after our discussion as possible. And with that discussion in mind, in order to absorb (as far as possible) what has been said and written, then, to make whatever use of it [the student] decides to. In other words, acceptance, rejection, modification or moving beyond are all fine responses (I expect all these different responses to a chapter-long set of my comments) as long as the student has intellectually engaged with the critique. It is the student’s thesis, not mine. (Supervisor Q, Pre-meeting I/V2 email, Q6: 6)

In their responses, supervisors revealed that different types of strategies were used to get students to follow the canon and act autonomously. For example, Supervisor B simultaneously acknowledges the importance of her feedback (in defence of the canon) and the student’s own sense of ownership:

I say to them: “I’ve given you all this feedback, you take on board what you feel happy with, and forget the rest, but read it carefully anyway” ... because they have to feel that it is their work. ... It can be very difficult because you want the best for them, but sometimes who knows, whether really it’s going to make a big difference in the long run? What is important is that they feel that it’s still their thesis. So I do try, I don’t think I always succeed, to make sure that they are mostly in control. (Supervisor B, I/V1, Q3A: 68-72)
In this and the other responses cited above there is a certain tension between promoting the student’s autonomy and asserting the supervisor’s right to defend the canon. In contrast, in the third dimension of ‘constrained’ choices, matters are far more directly and obviously fashioned by the supervisor’s direct invocation of canonical knowledge. While this third dimension comes into play relatively infrequently in the middle stages of candidature, it does so when the supervisor, for whatever reason, decided to insist on further improvements to the written work. In the following extract, the supervisor links this to her own disciplinary knowledge:

... there would be some topics where I intervene more decisively because I’ve researched in the area myself or I’m close enough in my research to know that some area needs to be developed. So it’s just being more insistent. “I am certain that you need to do more work in this area”, or “I’m almost certainly confident that you’ve really got this wrong,” or “that’s absolutely right” or whatever. So I’m much more definite. Now whether that’s good or bad though, see I don’t know. One of my most important things always is that this is not ... my thesis. But I do know I make an impact because I just know I do, but I don’t think any of them think it’s my thesis. They say: “Thank you and actually you’ve been a great supervisor”, or whatever, or nothing. But they don’t think I’ve taken over the thesis. (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q9: 28)

**Final stages**

If the early stages of the candidature are the time of ‘free’ choice and the middle stages of ‘negotiated’ or ‘conditional’ choice, the final stages, as examination approaches, is the time when ‘constrained’ choice most clearly comes into play. However, as in the middle stages, the other two dimensions are also apparent.

In relation to ‘free’ choice, some supervisors reported withdrawing and endorsing the student’s right to submit. Supervisor L acknowledged that: “In the final analysis, if they have totally disagreed with me that’s fine, and they’re not happy with the final product, they’ve always got the right to
submit” (I/V3, Supervisor L, Q17: 42). Similarly Supervisor F privileges the student’s autonomy and gives them the final say:

On final draft stuff, I always say to them: “This is what I think, but it’s up to you decide”. “OK, so, this is your thesis, it’s not my thesis, in the end it is your responsibility. You are being examined, I am not ... you have to decide.” And that will be ... even over trivial stuff like commas. (Supervisor F, I/V1, Q5/3A: 77)

Underpinning these supervisors’ comments in their standing back in this way, there was also a sense of detached realism. This was expressed by Supervisor J when she said:

I did have one student who sort of said that: “This is all I’m gonna do, I’m not gonna do any more and I’m just going to submit”. Now I just let Q submit, but I said that I didn’t think it was ready. It did get passed with some corrections without major rewrites. But there are students who just want to do their own thing in their own way and you just have to sort of go along with it. And see if the examiners will pass it. And just sort of hope that they will because you don’t want to go through the whole [thing again] ... (Supervisor J, I/V1, Q5/3A, 64-72)

This takes us to the realm of negotiated choices, where the leverage of the examination is used to persuade students to take up the supervisor’s suggestions. At the same time, the supervisor acknowledges the student’s ‘freedom’ by allowing for a range of acceptable disciplinary positions (that is, there are multiple ‘right’ ways rather than a single forced choice). Expanding on this, Supervisor Q said:

[S]ome of my comments which are often written in shorthand may sound as though they’re in the imperative. But I actually put a lot of question marks ... down the margin like “source - question mark”. Or I put a bit of a sentence with a big question mark and I tell them that a question mark
always means: “You consider what I’m saying, rather than me telling you what I’m saying”. So I say that: “This is your thesis” and I don’t expect them to take on board anything I say really specifically. … They don’t have to do what I say … but they need to take account of [it]. I sort of try and put it to them all the time that they should try and see me as some sort a surrogate examiner. Every question that they answer of mine is a question that they don’t face in their examiners’ reports. (Supervisor Q, I/V1, Q5/3A: 98-102)

Turning finally to the area of constrained choices in these final stages of candidature, here a far more directive stance emerged when the student’s successful examination was seen to be at risk. In this case, supervisors reported constraining their choices and favouring the regulatory side of the canon versus the student’s autonomy. At the same time, they still invited students to take charge and accept their authorial responsibilities. At this point, though, the possible penalties (from disappointing reports leading to revision or resubmission) are more clearly in view. The crunch point arises because examination is the point at which the student’s thesis makes its formal entry into the world of official judgements.

At such times supervisors may emphasise the value of ‘tough’ honesty:

If you’ve got hard feedback to give it’s important not to shirk it. As tough as it is, when you know it’s going to upset them, you still need to give it. It would be worse to not give the feedback. It just means you need to follow up and do bit of TLC and care and be sure they are still all right. Because it is hard to hear … when you’re giving your all and you’re at the end of your tether and you just want it to be done. And to be told that it’s still not good enough is really tough. But it’s important that you find the way to give the honest feedback and for me that means things like suggesting solutions as well at that point. I will also usually whenever I’m in that situation also say: “It is your decision … to take or not to take the advice. It is absolutely your decision. You do have the right to submit the thesis without the final approval of your supervisor.” (Supervisor F, I/V3, Q7: 32-34)
While this supervisor vests the final responsibility with the student, it is evident that any decision not to follow her advice may have far-reaching consequences as far as the examination is concerned. In this case, the ‘choice’ is coupled with the invocation that the student has the option to submit without the supervisor’s approval.46 This ‘right’ - a right which is risky for the student - was also commented on by Supervisor P who remembered that:

Well, I have had one case of that with a PhD student to the point where we did question whether the student would submit the thesis without my reading it at the end. But in the end, she came back and had attended to the matters that I suggested. ... My argument was at this level you have to do more work on it. So it was really her decision about do I put it in, unpolished if you like, or do I take N’s [names herself] advice and do a bit more work on it? And she did more work. (Supervisor P, I/V3, Q14: 48)

In the end stages, when students are usually tired and fed up, they may respond with frustration to supervisory requests to spend additional time on their work. Supervisor B noted that at this time the manner in which changes are suggested needs to be carefully considered especially if the revision process has been a taxing one:

I think at that stage the student certainly is running out of steam a bit and so it depends what the changes are and how many times they’ve worked on the chapter. ... So I think it’s more finessing the whole thing and making sure that it’s all relevant to the thesis and it’s put together nicely. And I don’t think the student finds problems with that because often they say: “Oh yeah, that’s flowing better now. I can see it.” (Supervisor B, I/V3, Q15: 35)

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46 Who should be the ‘final’ arbiter is confused by the fact students can submit without their supervisors’ approval, yet supervisors hopefully will sign off on the thesis. This ambiguity causes difficulties as I state in the introduction about who should decide. Ultimately, it is the student who has to decide and here we see that most supervisors like decisions to be consultative and consensual.
Where far-reaching revisions are required, the supervisor may decide to insist on change in order to maintain the integrity of intellectual work notwithstanding the student’s fatigue. Thus in the case of Supervisor F:

... [O]ne [situation] where I absolutely do like put my foot down in a sense of very firmly advise and don’t let them off the hook, is when I can see that there is a clear glaring problem. ... we got to the point where the final draft of the thesis came in and it wasn’t visible to me until I had the whole thesis and I read it from beginning to end to see that [she] was making a claim about her material which she could not make because she had not collected that data. ... so I remember the phone conversation because she was expecting this was the last draft and saying to her: “We have a big problem, because you have this massive hole. You cannot fill it. You are going to have to rewrite these sections to make it absolutely explicit that you are doing this and that therefore you cannot make comments about ... even if your readers might want to infer that you would not go that way.” ... (Supervisor F, I/V1, Q3A: 87-91)

Supervisor F also suggested that the fact that a student was tired and fed up might mean that a directive stance was precisely what was needed:

... but at the time I knew that, she was so fed up, she wanted to get rid of it, it was my fear that phone call was going to be hard for her no matter what. So I just directed her. I said: “This is what you will do. Here, here, here and here rewrite it this way and you've filled in the gap, you've papered it over, get it done.” So, yeah, and see again that’s driven by a sense of where they’re at. There’s a point I think where a student is so fed up with the whole damn thing that actually they don’t want to have to think for themselves any more ... they want you to tell them. So tell em: “Do this! Relax! Do it!” So, so yeah, I can get directive if I have to ... But not often. (Supervisor F, I/V1, Q3A: 91-95)
‘Taking over’ in this way remains problematic for supervisors as it conflicts with the importance of the thesis being the student’s ‘own’ work. In the following extract, Supervisor B explains how the difficulty is reduced through ensuring that (in this case) extensive changes to the student’s writing (structure, grammar etc.) did not alter the meaning of the work:

Y’s thesis is under examination and [her writing] was a big concern. ... I was a co-supervisor in that case, and without question something had to be done as it wouldn’t pass otherwise. However, I think that even though in that case the writing was extensively polished, I don’t think it really altered what the student was saying, just the way in which it was said. So, in other words, we weren’t adding interpretations or whatever, we were just making it readable. In general though, I try not to do that. But I think sometimes I get led astray a bit and do too much, but then I just get the eraser Well, it doesn’t matter if those are the words they used. I’ll wipe it off. (Supervisor B, I/V3, Q10: 12)

In brief, in this cluster of examples, we see how the spectre of the examination produces a different set of strategies and the student’s ‘freedom’ to choose is circumscribed by a narrower field of possibilities.

Concluding reflections on ‘under offering’ practices in supervision

In these concluding comments I reflect on two aspects of the discussion so far: first the particular qualities or attributes encouraged by each dimension of choice; second, the impact of ‘under offering’ on the play of power between supervisor and student.
The qualities encouraged by ‘under offering’

In broad terms, I have proposed that supervisors’ invitations are characterised by a series of practices that regulate students’ use of the canon and encourage their commitment to ownership, authorship and personal autonomy. My suggestion is that other more specific qualities are also associated with each of the three dimensions of choice discussed above.

The ‘free’ choice dimension encourages self-reliance, learning to ask the ‘right’ questions, being clear and strong in one’s writing voice, having a passion for one’s topic, and being self-reflective. Through being offered a relatively open choice, students are enabled to feel competent and promised that they can transform themselves as both subjects and producers of knowledge. Somewhat in contrast, the dimension of ‘negotiated’ choice, promotes interdependence, relying on each other’s contributions, sharing knowledge, and critically engaging with another’s ideas. The associated protocols involve compromise, open-mindedness, and co-knowing, encouraging students to feel they are working collaboratively as well as independently. Finally, under ‘constrained’ choice, often offered as a matter of last resort, the emphasis is firmly on the quality of the text, ensuring its feasibility, logicality, and suitability for examination.

Students’ responses and intellectual trajectory cannot, of course, be ‘read off’ these practices and neither is it the purpose of this chapter to assess the ‘degree of fit’ that actually occurs. It is, however, worth recording that while students generally spoke very favourably about the feedback offered by supervisors, and endorsed and appreciated the space offered to them to develop their own work, there were certain signs of difference and disengagement from the ethos described above. As mentioned in Chapter 5 (‘Under the wing’), there were occasions when students suggested they wanted more direction than they were actually given. Perhaps this is because they sensed that when the supervisor listens as the silent auditor s/he is, in fact, in control and - even in the ‘free’ choice scenario - able to judge the ‘right’ answer. In these circumstances, students are not in fact being invited
to make any choice but what is considered to be a ‘right’ choice. They are then put in a position of second-guessing the supervisor’s thinking about what the nature of these ‘right’ choices might be to gain approval. For example, we saw this positioning being played out in the case of Student K (and others), who, as she was being urged to discover her own answers through an authorising inner self, actually wanted her supervisors’ to direct her whilst also recognising her responsibilities for making decisions:

I think probably the biggest uncertainty whenever I get feedback is the initial: “Oh, I know that’s a problem, but it’s a problem because I didn’t know what to do with it before or what do I do about it now?” And usually Y and X’s response is: “That’s up to you”. And even though I know this, it is up to me and there’s nothing they can do about it really, I want them to. So it’s like: “I don’t know, tell me! What do you think? What shall I do?” … It’s my responsibility, it’s my study and I choose. (Student K, Post-meeting I/V2, Q5: 15)

In Chapter 6 we also saw that students do not necessarily defer to their supervisor’s feedback but allow for a cooling off period within which to decide what to do. While, as will be discussed below, this means that the latitude offered to them is not illusory, the tone underlying their responses suggests a more pragmatic, realistic position than that evoked by some of the language of autonomy and scholarship. For example, Student H made decisions based on the particular meanings/arguments she wished to convey/advance:

I’m more able to weigh it up and think: “Well yes that could work, but I want to do it this way”. That’s only been one or two comments where I’ve thought: “No, I’m not going to do that”. No, “not going to do that” is wrong because there are never any directive comments, but well: “Yes, but I can see it might work that way, but I want to work it this way”, where X’s given me an alternative and I’ve sort of thought: “No, I’m not going to do that”. (Student H, I/V3, Q13: 72)
Relational power and ‘under offering’

In this thesis I have argued that the power relationship between student and supervisor is both asymmetrical and relational - that is, it is both hierarchical and interactive - the student can modify the responses of the supervisor as well as the supervisor modifying the students’ responses. ‘Under offering’ illustrates how these two processes are simultaneously at work.

In terms of the asymmetry of the relationship I have pointed out that supervisors discipline students (in the sense of provoking decisions) while also inviting them to take charge of this decision-making. In this process, students are not actually ‘free’ to choose for supervisors shape the form the decision should take. The exercise of power is partially buried, and doctoral students are controlled in the process of being empowered. Further, as subjects of ‘under offering’, students may come to infer that they only have a provisional competency and that they need to defer to their supervisor’s authority. This is not necessarily negative for it may provide a sense of security. As Foucault (1976b) notes, just as there is pleasure in giving orders so “there’s also pleasure in being told what to do” (p. 55).47

The data suggests that supervisors emphasised autonomy/ownership over the strict claims of the canon. As noted earlier in the chapter, they were reluctant to explicitly direct students except when it came to the feasibility of the project or the visibility of the examination. This may partly reflect the fact that students have been selected so that they can be trusted to observe the canon leaving supervisors free to place the emphasis on autonomy in the service of intellectual growth. (In this case one would expect a more directive approach with students judged less able academically.)

It would, though, be a mistake to conclude that the freedom offered to students is illusory. To the contrary, under this liberal ethos they do indeed have room to move; their back is not up against the wall as in Foucault’s

47 I am indebted to Barbara Grant (2005b) for this idea. She makes this point in her Hegelian Master/Slave reading of supervision to highlight “this unconscious dimension of supervision, a dimension in which the architecture of Master and Slave can be deeply pleasurable.” (p. 137)
classic states of domination. As we have seen, even in the most constrained field of choice when the supervisor directs the student to make revisions, it is still the student who has the final say on their texts, including the decision to submit the thesis without supervisory approval. That any such decision carries real institutional risks (e.g. lack of a supervisor’s support in the advent of mixed examiner’s reports) does not negate its existence.

This degree of freedom means that the relations between supervisors and students remain interactive and relational even though asymmetrical. In this study, evidence of students’ capacity to interact with and modify their supervisors’ feedback is found in many of the student responses. For example, here we see that the student is faced with conflicting advice from her two supervisors. Her secondary supervisor has told her to restructure her Literature Review chapter while her principal supervisor has suggested only minor changes:

... there were some very different ways of thinking about the Lit. Review. I haven’t really resolved that ... as one supervisor said: “This is fine, we need to be more critical here ... but otherwise it’s fine.” Whereas the other supervisor said: “It needs to be completely restructured because ... I don’t recognise this as a Lit. Review”. ... It was more about: “This isn’t conforming.” (Student G, I/V1, Q3B: 142)

In this case, we see that the student (after recovering from what she initially considers is “quite painful almost brutal criticism”) compromises and takes something positive from the secondary supervisor’s directive:

In the end I retained the structure. There was a useful thing in my secondary supervisor’s response and so I changed my focus in the Lit. Review to focus on concepts and I moved away from organising it around specific authors. Changes were at the level of sentence structure not the structure overall. (Student G, I/V3: Q2:10-14)
In this next example, Student K asks her co-supervisor (Y) to refrain from correcting the grammar in her texts:

Recently, I told Y to stop grammatically correcting my work because I didn’t want him to read it for full stops and commas, I wanted him to read it for the content and structure. Like the bigger picture. I didn’t want him to worry about reading a paragraph and making it perfect. That paragraph was going to be deleted in a minute, and I told him it wasn’t helpful and he’s been trying really hard not to, but like anyone I know it’s difficult not to do that. It’s an easy thing to do isn’t it, correct the spelling? (Student K, I/V3, Q4: 12)

The specific feedback she requests provides clarity for her and makes her supervisors’ task easier:

And so now when I hand in drafts and it’s something that’s actually developed really over the last five months ... I actually ask for specific things. Like recently I handed six chapters to X and I said: “I don’t need you to read chapters two and chapter five, but they’re there for you if you want to have them for the context. But I really want you to focus on these two chapters and this is what I’m looking for, whether the structure’s clear, whether the point of the chapter is clear, whether it fits into the whole thesis.” So, I think that’s actually been helpful to both my supervisors too, that I’ve been clear about what I want from them. (Student K, I/V3, Q4: 14)

Finally, the interactive, relational context ensures that the exercise of power is never straightforward, never transparent, but always underpinned by a certain ambiguity, with the potential for misunderstanding and change. It also means that the relations between student and supervisor are affect and emotion laden, played out in different ways including “excitement, irritation, motivation, anger, frustration” (Kameen, 1995: 451). In the next chapter, I turn to the consequent relationship between the more ‘transparent’ and the more ‘mysterious’ elements that characterise the relations between student and supervisor.
a female postgraduate student:
Reciprocal honesty [is the advice I would give to a new postgraduate]. For example, like the student said [in the quote you read]: “I didn’t know what I was allowed to ask for”. Well tell them: “I’m not sure what I’m allowed to ask for”. And that’s what I’ve done and it’s really worked. When you feel uncertain if the supervisor says something you say: “I feel really uncertain about what you’re saying. I’m going to have to go and ...”. And they’ll say: “Well, why don’t you just go away and think about it and we’ll talk about it when you feel more certain about it”. ... Just being honest helps everyone I think.

(Student K, I/V3, Q27: 50)

a female professor of Sociology:
... perhaps there also needs to be an acknowledgement, on the part of both supervisor and student, that precisely because of this seamless web, there are bound to be aspects of our practice/interactions that will remain invisible to us, just as our 'personalities' are.

(Harris, 2001)

a male supervisor:
It’s a mystery, a constant mystery. You just never know if you’ve said the right thing or done the right thing. ... So yeah, I do think a part of it does rely on intuition and stuff you know.

(Supervisor M, I/V3, Q6: 16)
Introduction

The intersubjective nature of supervisory practice causes uneasiness for those who value certainty and predictability. In an effort to tame/control this volatility the current institutional focus places significant emphasis on demystifying student-supervisor relations. It does so by promoting an ethos of transparency, equality and openness. As well as this, the current orthodoxy promotes the notion that supervision is a co-operative effort between “a pair of rational, organised, well informed (i.e. thoroughly orderly) speaking equals” (Grant, 2005b: 105). Further, to ensure students submit a timely and disciplined thesis text, there is now a greater focus on ‘skills’ training and explicating research/writing practices. All this suggests a rational, orderly process. Against this, in this chapter I suggest that supervision is infused with ‘mystery’ as much as ‘transparency’.

My discussion starts by considering how mystery and transparency play out in supervision. I then use interview data to map out how these two elements were played out in the student-supervisor relations in this study, placing the data within the discursive traditions described by Grant (2005a; 2005b). Following this, I also explore how transparency and mystery were actually experienced by participants. In concluding, I reflect on the effects of transparency and mystery in relation to student-supervisor relations, proposing that the practice of supervisory feedback will always involve opacity, inequality and intangibility.

Mystery and transparency in supervision practice

In the following brief account I identity the main elements of mystery and transparency with respect to: supervisor-student relations; supervisor and text; and student and text.
Student-supervisor relations
The literature reflecting the dominant institutional ethos, positions mystery as something to be overcome, arguing that supervision needs to be taken “out of the realm of mystery and metaphor” (Pearson, 2001: 93). These technical and rationally-oriented discourses work to promote transparent, open and equal relations. They argue that transparency enables productive relationships free of ambiguity and position supervision as, ideally, rational and orderly.

Opposing this, the critical academic literature generally recognises that supervisor-student relations are subject to ‘mystery’, that is relatively unknowable, subject to doubt, ambiguity and uncertainty. These elements are attributed to the blending of the intellectual and the personal (Grant, 2005b), to the asymmetrical power relations that obtain between supervisor and student, to the nature of communication and its impact on decision-making, and to the ways that desire and difference play out in the everyday practices of supervision. This literature recognises that the relations of supervision can never be fully known or articulated and are inherently unstable.

Supervisor and text
In the views that endorse transparency, supervisors are seen to provide feedback according to explicit and specified criteria in a context where research/writing practices have a specific disciplinary form. In this way, feedback is a matter of ‘exchange’ and negotiation takes place in a relational, equal/reciprocal and collegial manner. The text is seen to be amenable to correction on the basis of explicit corrective feedback. In contrast, it can be suggested that mystery is always present given that there is perforce an unknowable element in the way in which knowledge is acquired and imparted, how the supervisor thinks and imparts the kinds of knowledge, attitudes and values she supports. Further the supervisor cannot know how students will read the comments or ensure that they will be taken in the ways intended.
Student and text
Numerous mysterious elements surround the ways students produce text and develop a scholarly identity. Because each student’s learning process is unique, there is mystery surrounding the student’s struggle to become an authority. In this process, a student must construct her own sense of authority and use her unfolding process of learning to free herself of the need for the supervisor’s authority. This affects the timeline in unpredictable ways as students acquire self-confidence and overcome self-doubt about the quality of their work at different rates. Against this, the transparency ethos suggests that if students acquire the ‘right’ skills and make the right choices the research/writing process and emergent thesis text can be properly managed. As well as this, transparency is expected to give students a clear picture of who they are as pedagogic, literate and disciplinary subjects.

In Chapter 4, “Under pressure”, I argued that the pressures on completion were producing an increase in regulatory measures affecting both students and supervisors. I outlined a number of moves to regulate the research/writing process and promote transparency. This newer focus, as set out in the site institution’s “Code of Practice”, urges the recognition of clear communication, reasonable and harmonious conduct, straightforward transmissions from advisor to advisee, choice, autonomy, joint clarification of the candidate’s and the supervisor’s expectations of the process of supervision, and the efficient and punctual achievement of milestones. Transparency, I suggested, privileges accountability, planning, explicit communication, truthfulness and objectivity, as well as faith in the affective elements of trust and honesty. Such hopefulness is also symptomatic of the technical-rational view of communication and a notion of social relations that assumes a highly generalised student and reasonable and rational supervision (Grant, 2005b).

In this way the current realities of higher education make the case for a techno-rational and orderly process, divested of the obfuscations of an older

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48 At the site institution the Code of Practice document is known as “Responsibilities of Postgraduate Research Candidates” (2006) and “Responsibilities of Postgraduate Research Student Supervisors” (2006).
model heavily infused with myth and mystery. According to Gore (1995a), a contemporary educational focus is about “naming, communicating and upholding norms ... of behaviour, of attitudes, of knowledge” (p. 172). What were “mysterious and intimate phenomenon” [have been] “radically shaken up” (E. McWilliam & Palmer, 1995: 32)\(^{49}\) with a view to demystifying practices which obscure aspects of supervision and candidature.

The mystery/transparency balance

So far the discussion suggests that while academic institutions are quite explicit about what constitutes ‘scholarly’ knowledge and the appropriate form in which the thesis should be presented, they are silent about the creative (and more mysterious) dimensions involved in its production. They are also silent about the ambiguities involved in any relationship, let alone one involving the asymmetrical power relations characterising supervision. My suggestion is that in stressing transparency and rational collegiality without addressing the limits of what can be made explicit and how reciprocal accountability can be achieved in asymmetrical relationships, the current orthodoxy reaches for what it cannot obtain and masks its own limits.

In essence, an emphasis on either transparency or mystery alone is problematic: while one risks masking the politics of knowledge-production, the other may exaggerate them. I stress here that both transparency and mystery enable knowledge production and that both have limitations. Transparency is integral to reassuring students and reducing uncertainty and anxiety about the process. But when it positions research/writing as a rational process to be negotiated and managed, it oversimplifies, even denies, the less tangible aspects of the process. This may lead us to seek facile solutions and/or direct inappropriate blame inward when the process is not subject to the technologies prescribed. The recognition of mystery can assist in the writing process by allowing for open-endedness, making room for uncertainty, creating a necessary and respectful distance between supervisor and student. However, it may also mythologise the more difficult aspects, create the illusion that the process is uncontrollable or beyond a student’s ability or lead

\(^{49}\) Referring to the pre-1970s era.
to a reluctance to request specific forms of help. Both elements, then, need to work in conjunction.

Profiles of dominant and emergent discourses of supervision

In discussing the interview data (in the next section) I use Barbara Grant’s (2005a) pivotal analysis of supervision discourses to set my own suggestions relating to transparency and mystery in context. Prior to this I provide an overview of her analysis.

Grant (2005a) identifies seven supervisory discourses four of which are currently dominant, and three emergent. The dominant four comprise: the psychological (Psy), the traditional-academic (Trad-ac), the technical-rational (Techno), the neo-liberal (Com). The three emergent discourses comprise: the psychoanalytic (Psycho), the radical (Rad), and Indigenous Kaupapa Maori. The last of these is not included here given its particular relevance to New Zealand, coupled with the fact that none of the participants in this study were Indigenous. Norm Sheehan (forthcoming), who is from The University of Queensland is currently writing a book chapter on Indigenous supervision. (Of the little relevant Australian research which I have found on this subject, the report by Indigenous Project Team (1997) is more slanted towards Indigenous students’ experiences of candidature, rather than describing Indigenous supervision practices.) I start by discussing the dominant four discourses and then introduce the two remaining emergent discourses. As will become evident, each discourse configures power relations in different ways.

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50 Recommendations for increasing the participation of Australian Indigenous students and addressing the poor completion rates of these students are discussed in James and Devlin (2006). This recent DEST-commissioned report concludes that there is a desperate need for Indigenous research and for issues surrounding this research to be investigated, such as “definition problems (various interpretations of Indigenous research ..., research conducted by Indigenous people or research into Indigenous issues), the unevenness of the quality of Indigenous research, the small number of Indigenous researchers and Indigenous people with PhDs, ... and fears about the possible impact of the Research Quality Framework if it fails to appropriately recognise Indigenous research” (James & Devlin, 2006: 7).
Ascendant and dominant

Psychological (Psy) discourse
The ascendant psychological discourse privileges intersubjective relationships and the whole person who is supervised. Following Foucault, Grant (2005a) suggests that psychological discourse occurs when feelings are held to be ‘most relevant for morality’ (p. 352). The Psy-self, she says, “is made up of many capacities (intelligence, motivation, satisfaction, self-esteem, emotions, personality, mental well-being etc.), which are distributed unequally in populations but which can be measured in order to ascertain the position of an individual in relation to the norm” (p. 340).

The Psy-Supervisor “sensitively and flexibly ... guides the novice along a developmental trajectory to maturity as an independent researcher” (Grant, 2005a: 341) through the balancing of care and gentle discipline. Privileged elements of this discourse include the ineffable qualities of trust, mutual respect, honesty, and open communication. In Psy-Supervision, power relations are akin to those of the “therapist and the client: a complex blend of the symmetry of mutual interpersonal respect and the asymmetry of dependent trust required from the guided towards the guide” (Grant, 2005a: 341). In these circumstances, the student places trust in the supervisor and relies on his/her observations, interpretations, feedback, challenging and use of expertise. This produces a subtle and elusive power dynamic, difficult to pin down and articulate. This discourse surfaced often in the interview responses. In parallel with Grant’s (2005a) study, there is evidence here that the psychological discourse “is in the ascendant” (p. 350).

Traditional-academic (Trad-ac) discourse
In contrast to the Psy-Student who is endowed with a range of capacities and emotions which Psy-minded supervisors aim to develop through a potent blend of care and gentle discipline, the Trad-Student undergoes an intellectual apprenticeship through being disciplined by the indifferent yet “highly personalized” (Yeatman, 1995: 9) attentions of the Trad-Supervisor. This supervisor engages and tests the student in an “active process of
confrontation with the limits of her/his understanding” (Grant, 2005a: 342). In this model, the scholar-in-the-making should be stoic, self-disciplined and persistent. In responding to the supervisor’s aloofness, the student acquires a scholarly identity. Trad-Supervision is “infused with sovereign indifference from the Trad-Supervisor ... alongside grateful, even eager, subjection from the Trad-Student” (Grant, 2005a: 341-342). Its power relations correspond to “the guru/disciple relationship” (Grant, 2005a: 341). There some traces of this discourse in this interview study. When it featured, it was in the criticisms supervisor participants offered from their own experiences as doctoral candidates.

Technical-scientific (Techno) discourse
Along similar lines to the passive Trad-Student, who stoically undergoes a rigorous and unrelenting scholarly formation, the “malleable and obedient Techno-Student ... listens, tries and reports” (Grant, 2005a: 343). Under the technical-scientific discourse, supervision emerges as a neatly managed process. Writing is a skill to be practised and honed: “The Techno-Supervisor is a trained and expert scientist, the Techno-Student an inexperienced trainee” (Grant, 2005a: 342). The close supervision of the student’s research process necessitates ongoing diagnosis of students’ abilities. Techno-Supervision emphasises process, order, co-operation and project management, with milestone completions exemplifying the smooth and timely components of the writing process. The supervisor imparts the necessary skills/techniques emphasising clarity, logic, and planned activities.

The power relations mobilised by this discourse are those between expert and apprentice, with close surveillance of students ensuring that they are trained in the correct research methods. With the Techno-Supervisor’s observations, judgements (e.g. manoeuvring students to choose safe topics) and instructions the project is kept on a steady course. Under this discourse, the student’s progress is “subject to improvement and control by devices such as skills training or introducing incentives for swift completion” (Acker, Hill, & Black, 1994: 484). It is interesting to note that Salmon (1992) criticises this ‘training’ approach for its “slavish obedience to given form” by which the student
carefully applies “certain standard scientific procedures to a particular topic, [and] learns how to do research” (p. 10). This discourse surfaced only occasionally in conjunction with neo-liberalism where supervisors were in pursuit of a timely completion, as outlined in Chapter 4 “Under Pressure”.

**Neo-liberal (Com) discourse**
The neo-liberal (Com) discourse positions supervision as a contract, and the student as a consumer of services. Under it, the student negotiates the terms of supervision as an “autonomous chooser” (Marshall, 1997: 598), and his or her supervisor is a provider of services. This student is made accountable through being answerable to the terms of the consumer contract (Grant, 2005a: 343). The associated power relations have a quasi-legal character since the contract entitles both student and supervisor to invoke their rights and responsibilities. The proliferation of supervision agreements over the last twenty years illustrates the influence of this discourse with both parties expending efforts to specify entitlements, roles and responsibilities. Under it, feedback becomes a commodity and student ‘satisfaction’ is the measure used to rate the success of their transactions. As Grant (2005a) points out, the neo-liberal discourse gives students a position and framework from which to ask for feedback: “it offers this student ... a way to argue for something which would be difficult to argue for from the position of Trad-Student” (p. 348). Such frankness about the quality of the feedback, recommended as a way of preventing potential strains on supervision, would not be possible for students positioned within other discourses, as I discuss later. There was, however, little trace of this discourse in this interview study, possibly because of the institutional ‘ethos’ (at least at a micro level) governing the participants in the study, and/or the selection process whereby they agreed to participate. Nonetheless, this discourse did appear occasionally to reveal the inconsistencies/discrepancies in supervisor accountability.
Emergent and marginal

_Psychoanalytic (Psycho) discourse_
In the emergent psychoanalytic (Psycho) discourse supervisory practices recognise the play of desire, identity, and (counter) transferences. These terms draw attention to what both parties bring to the student-supervisor relationship in terms of perceptions, feelings, actions and dispositions towards each other. The dynamics between them are thought to be influenced by prior relationships with significant others.

The power relations replicate those between the “analyst and analysand: the relatively stable and asymmetrical relations between the ‘unhappy’ one who needs the other’s talking cure; and the unpredictably shifting relations of transference and counter-transference that ensue in such heavily charged encounters” (Grant, 2005a: 344). These transferences seem to arise from the investment in the supervisor’s power and authority as discussed by Giblett (1992), and/or the thesis text. Both of these can make it hard for the student to take critical feedback, delete sections, and so on. These elements work to make student-supervisor relations mysterious and relatively unpredictable. There were scatterings of this discourse throughout the interview data.

_Radical (Rad) discourse_
Rad-Supervision has been influenced by the progressive, critical and feminist orientations which place “social interests and power relations at the heart of supervision” (Grant, 2005a: 344). Here, the social positions of student and supervisor - their gender, age, health, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation - are recognised to be central to supervision and even when student and Rad-supervisor share social positions, they are aware that “their interests cannot be the same because of their different, and unequal, institutional positions” (Grant, 2005a: 344). Under it, the critically-conscious supervisor may need to address confidence and emotional issues in order to ‘repair’ the power differential. Collaboration is emphasised and a relaxed and graduated writing process is promoted to reduce the student’s self-doubt. There is a heightened sensibility to and critique of gendered language use. Through sharing
authority and recognising students’ authority, power is seen to shift around. This discourse surfaced from time to time in the interview responses.

Unsettling transparency and mystery in supervision practice

In this study, the discourses that emerged most clearly were the psychological, traditional-academic, psychoanalytic and radical. The most evident was the Psy model. The emergent psychoanalytical and radical discourses also had a distinctive presence. In comparison, the neo-liberal and techno-scientific discourses played a relatively minor role. It is, therefore, on the first four mentioned above that I concentrate in the following discussion.

Psychological (Psy) discourse

The Psy discourse - under which supervision is “persuasively constituted as first and foremost an interpersonal relationship” (Grant, 2005a: 350) - pervaded the interview responses. Because relationship is a constant concern under Psy supervision, transparency is sought around establishing and maintaining intersubjective relations. Here transparency operates through an injunction (on both parties) to be ‘honest’ - with the supervisor providing critical feedback when it is considered necessary, and the student letting the supervisor know if and when she finds her manner of feedback difficult.

As already indicated, expectations of honest feedback are endorsed in the “Code of Practice” of the site institution. They and related documents require that students are to be taken seriously as scholars and provided opportunities to improve and learn. Psy-Students are focussed on learning the ‘truths’ of their abilities and expected to use this knowledge to construct their sense of identity. The Psy-Supervisor must have the capacities to know about students’ confidence, their stage of thesis progress, and be attuned to students’ changing psychological states to judge the ‘right’ level of feedback.

As well as making the process open, transparency has the benefit of giving students a clear picture of where they stand in relation to institutional norms
and expectations. In the following excerpt, a student elaborates her expectations of supervision and provides a ‘wish list’ in relation to her supervisors’ feedback on her work:

Yes, so I want good advice about writing at every stage. I would like [my supervisors] to be able to remember what it is I’m doing and where it is I’m going, based on my proposal. And also I would like them to sort of remember what we discussed and remember when I say: “This is where I’m heading”, I’d like them to remember that from when they’re reading the work. ... so that they can say: “Yes, I can see that it’s on track”. And I want them to be honest, obviously that’s absolutely essential. (Student G, I/V1, Q3A: 132-136)

Supervisors also acknowledged the importance of honesty but said that it needed to be used judiciously and flexibly. Working against the practices of transparency, they owned up to withholding or filtering feedback to protect students’ feelings. Such diffidence was underpinned by their desire to bolster students’ sense of authorship when self-confidence was lacking. For Supervisor F fundamental self-doubt was far from uncommon:

... And I think the depth of some people’s lack of self-confidence and lack of self-esteem, the strength of that voice of self-doubt that can trip up even the most competent person who can’t rest easy with a sense of confidence about their work. I’m constantly surprised about how many times you go back over those same conversations because [students] do produce very good work. So, again, it’s about the relationship. You can’t get away from the need to be constantly thinking through the relationship you have with somebody, who they are, and what they need, what you are able to give, and about what kind of feedback. ... but figuring out what, why I need to give them ... (Supervisor F, I/V1, Q2B: 73)

As this foreshadows, an inherent tension within the Psy-relationship is that the requirement to ‘care’ for the student can sit uneasily with the need for
formal feedback and assessment along somewhat standardised guidelines. In other words, the ‘intimate’ elements of the relationship may jar with the requirement to ensure a well-written thesis. There are also intangible qualities in the Psy-model, elements which provide plentiful opportunities for mystery. Chief among these is the element of trust. Being able to have confidence in the supervisor is central to Psy-Supervision. And trust is an intangible and ineffable thing. Its elements are well captured by the next student:

I guess Sally, I didn’t mention that what’s really important is trust. And clearly X trusts me to do the work. And she trusts that when she finally does get it that the quality's going to be reasonable. So I think that’s an important thing between a supervisor and a student. And you have to trust in them that your supervisor values what you do and is really engaging with what you’re doing. And is looking out for your best interests. But is allowing you to do it your own way, and not trying to fit you into some kind of box. (Student H, I/V1, Q3C: 238-242)

The hierarchical relationship between supervisor and student complicates the Psy model and the assumptions that underpin it. As Grant (2005a) suggests, Psy-Supervision has all the risks attendant on any attempt to establish “a satisfying interpersonal relationship in a context of significant institutional and social differences and limitations” (Grant, 2005a: 351). While egalitarian orientated Psy-Supervisors may believe they can conduct an equal relationship with students, the following supervisor’s comments capture some of the factors making this difficult. They also introduce elements of the more ‘traditional’ elements of supervision into the Psy calculus:

I firmly believe that the supervisory relationship is an equal one, and that at times the student is teaching you; and at times it’s the other way around. And these roles go backwards and forwards, but basically you’re really trying to facilitate that student. Rather than saying this is how it’s gotta be done. But, of course, there are constraints. I try as much as
possible to let the writing come from the student. But, you are also trying to model a process of thinking, which is what the writing is reflecting so it can’t be totally just what they want to do. ... the freedom is not licensed like A. S. Neil said. No matter how independent they are, they are still dependent on you to [judge]: Is this acceptable, is this really going in the right direction and so on? I still think there’s a residue where they may say: “Well, this supervisor may know best”. (Supervisor B, I/V1, Q3D: 114-116)

The same kind of difficulty is acknowledged by Supervisor Q who emphasised that:

... it’s a very tricky relationship because it’s still a relationship of supervisor and student so it’s not an equal relationship and I think to pretend that it is ... is really wrong because then when you give feedback which says: “Look I think you just have to reshape this chapter, I can’t see how it’s going to be acceptable to examiners that way, or you’ve got to go out and do more research in this area,” I don’t think it’s going to work. Thinking in terms of successful examination of the thesis, [students] have to remain I think accepting of your judgement in that. And so it’s not an equal relationship, but as far as possible I try and make it a friendly one. (Supervisor Q, I/V1, Q2A: 58)

This supervisor thus voices a combination of psychological (friendly/supportive aspect) elements with traditional-academic (corrective and directive aspect) elements. This fusion, with all its tensions and ambiguities, is well accepted in contemporary supervision. The supervisor has to be:

very tough and let the candidate know when things are not going right. ... A balance has to be struck between being supportive and caring, yet tough on the problem. The student has to hear that the comments are not intended as a personal attack ... At the same time, acknowledging what
has been done well is also an important part of positive feedback. (Love & Street, 1998: 155)

Curiously, when supervisors acknowledge students as having done something well or got it ‘right’, students are often surprised, with the acknowledgment appearing as something of a mystery.\(^{51}\) It would seem that students are puzzled by the perceived strengths in their writing. This perhaps explains the thread of anxiety that runs through the student data in this study. Students had difficulties trusting in their ability to do their research/writing. Indeed several responded that the most surprising aspect of their candidature was that they could in fact do it.

**Traditional-academic (Trad-ac) discourse**

In the Trad-ac discourse the drive for transparency stems from the privileged status of knowledge and the certainties bestowed by its specific disciplinary form. It also lies in the fixed and differential power relations between student and supervisor. Here there is no escaping the supervisor’s authority because supervisors are vested with the power to assert knowledge claims as disciplinary guardians.

I found that students spoke more readily of the explicit and fixed power relations characteristic of Trad-Supervision than did supervisors. They also suggested that there were times when they could feel comforted by the supervisor’s expertise, believing that its professional authority would strengthen the thesis:

... and you tend to accept [the feedback] because well ... there is a sense in the relationship that you are getting a professional opinion. And a sense that what is being said has to be negotiated with or understood on its merits. There’s a reason you go to a professional for advice and this

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\(^{51}\) My thanks to Dr Con Coroneos for pointing out the sense of surprise students may feel at positive feedback (e.g. ticks or smileys in the margins).
professional is giving you advice, so to a large extent you accept that.
(Student Y, I/V3, Q5: 20)

Critics point out that it is also the case that under Trad-Supervision the student may passively absorb knowledge from the all-knowing supervisor through “a sort of intellectual osmosis” (Connell, 1985a: 53). A certain mystery then attaches to supervision given its aloof, unknowable, indifferent and sometimes charismatic qualities, which set the supervisor above and beyond the student. On his or her part the Trad-Student is “responsible for how he [sic] takes up into his own creative powers the exemplary virtues and skills of the master” (Yeatman, 1995: 9). As indicated in previous chapters, this (in conjunction with belief in the pressures on supervisors’ time) may make it difficult for students to request meetings, clarification, or particular forms of feedback, with this working against transparent, open relations.

Even though the detached ethos of Trad-Supervision implies impartiality and objectivity, its distance and aura mean that there is an untouchable (mysterious) element to it. This drives students’ anxieties about the process, not so much in terms of gaining the supervisor’s respect for them as persons (as in the psychological discourse), but in proving their worth intellectually. The student has to focus efforts on asserting their cleverness and demonstrating they can get things ‘right’. This creates the conditions for the mystifying and élitist practices of ‘second guessing’. While Trad-supervision was far less evident than the Psy-model in this study, it did appear and certainly worked in conjunction with it. As Grant (2005b) argues, because this discourse is embedded in institutional policies and practices it never entirely disappears.

*Psychoanalytic (Psycho) discourse*

Transparency in the emergent psychoanalytic (Psycho) discourse takes effect in the effort to make the intersubjective, intensely felt nature of student-supervisor interactions a central concern. The focus on these dimensions distinguishes this discourse from the Psy and Trad-ac discourses both of which
are more likely to rely on transparency in the sense that they assume an open, ‘rational’, discourse. Given this, in Psycho-Supervision transparency is only ever glimpsed momentarily and mystery is always assumed to be at work.

Zöe Sofoulis (1997) argues that in intersubjective encounters both parties may strive to infer each other’s psyches and impute each other’s intentions. This necessarily introduces indeterminacy into the process. As this next supervisor explains, each party’s reaction can never be predicted and known, and each situation eludes facile solutions or techniques:

Oh absolutely! [providing feedback is “the most complex function the [supervisor] must perform and the most difficult function to perform well”]. And of course it varies with your own mood, externalities and other sorts of things, how much sleep you’ve had. So you make mistakes. But PhD students really listen and they’re really sensitive. And you’ve got to be careful and I’m not always as careful as I should be. But sometimes it works OK because sometimes it’s driven by sort of intuitions, gut feelings of particular moments, and sometimes you go out on a limb and sort of try something and say something that you know is going to be a bit provocative and you just don’t know whether it will work or not. No matter how hard you try you never quite get their psyche. And then even if you did you wouldn’t know what sort of moment they’re in, so what’s the right thing to say is so hard. (Supervisor M, I/V3, Q6: 16)

Sofoulis (1997) also suggests that in student-supervisor relations the student seeks to be recognised by the authoritative supervisor who is esteemed as the ‘one supposed to know’ (the transference object), “but also as the ‘one who knows me’ … who endorses me (recognises and legitimates), who discovers and trains me, who knows my work, who takes it seriously, the one with whom I co-discover and realise my thesis” (emphasis as in original, Sofoulis, 1997: 10). These relations, as Grant points out, are “activated by the structural inequality of supervision and worked through over the course of the supervision” (Grant, 2005a: 344). Risks lie in the possibility of misrecognition of the supervisors’ attributes and/or misreadings on the part of either student
or supervisor of what the other desires. To counteract this, the supervisor cited below aims for transparency to prevent potential misunderstandings:

I think, partly it’s not being misunderstood, misrecognised or treated as if I’m somebody that I’m not. I bring particular things to supervision, but I don’t bring everything to supervision. In some instances I don’t bring the highest level of knowledge about this field. And in part, part of it is just being clear in my own mind and getting it reasonably clear [to students] the sort of person I am and the sort of things I can contribute and what I can’t. OK, I have to say to people: “Look this is what I do and there are limits to that. Other people give all sorts of other stuff that you need. But there’s only so many things that I am and can be.” And most of them know me and they know what I can do. (Supervisor M, I/V1, Q3C: 180-192)

These comments suggest that ‘knowing’ this supervisor includes apprehending his limits and that this is necessary to give students realistic expectations. Even so, the supervisor has little control over how students choose to position him and themselves in relation to his authority. In the following excerpt he struggles with his projected image as “ogre” and explains how he responds to it:

[One of the challenges of supervision is] not being too set up as an ogre. I mean trying to moderate the extent to which [this occurs]. I have to live with the fact that coming to see me about their thesis is one of the most stressful events in any month or week, or whatever, and we go down and have coffee, we chat. And yeah but that’s OK. I mean I don’t mind a level of apprehension. I have to make sure it doesn’t get out of control. And people aren’t using me as an ogre for no particular reason. “Like, I just want you to be there to be an ogre.” “But, but why am I? Why do you want to be frightened of me?” “We have to be.” I have to be careful not to be … set up too much with that sort of thing, an authority figure who makes them or who’s somehow responsible [for delaying their progress]. I am responsible to an extent and I can be used as an ogre … and they know that and in one way they talk about: “Oh, oh, oh. You’re going to see
[names self] are you? Oh, oh, oh.” And they laugh about it. Because it’s also part of the strategy, and that’s an interesting [dimension], the duality of the supervisory relationship. I think that’s a really fascinating part of it. (Supervisor M, I/V1, Q3C: 180-192)

Sofoulis (1997) suggests that the supervisor needs to find a balance between their various roles of “mastery and mothering, authority and collaboration, to properly fulfil their role as mentor or guiding expert” and to simultaneously allow the student’s voice to emerge. This does not preclude “domains of mastery, expertise, authority, or discipleship” (p. 10). In the example cited above, the supervisor appears to be struggling with this issue, with the notion of “ogre” representing the authority of the father/tough coach/disciplinarian, involving, apparently, appreciation as well as fear on the part of the students (and a certain amount of pleasure or amusement on his) to be offset by “relaxed” meetings and over coffee.

For Simon (1995) the intensity of such relationships creates a volatile mix because “a professor’s speech (what’s said and not said), writing (what’s written and not written), and actions (what’s done and not done) are made to bear considerable intellectual and affective weight” (p. 98). In the example cited below, friendship adds a further layer of complexity:

Well to an extent because X [my student] and I have a sort of closer relationship than other students that I’ve got. And so negotiating transfer between just chatting as sort of friends and people in the department, and chatting with supervisor/supervisee is a real transition. And so for us, it’s had levels of complexity that [aren’t] always pleasant. And it’s sort of weird because you keep forgetting the Oedipal dimensions of the supervisory relationship. And you forget and so stuff that might be with just a friend like light-hearted ribbing has an importance that if you’re not really careful you forget. Oh no, this is just us hangin’ around shootin’ the breeze type conversation. And you can’t do that. Because to a certain extent I guess it always is present and you try to sort of mark the two interactions but it’s really hard. (Supervisor M, I/V3, Q8: 22)
When this supervisor describes his efforts to help students find their voice, the psychoanalytical element is again evident. In the following extract he explains delays in roughly psychodynamic terms:

I think some of the delay we're experiencing now is a function of that voice moment. She doesn’t ask me for permission as much as she used to. ... I have absolute confidence [that she will finish], but I think we’ll hit another moment of doubt and her confidence will [dive] because these things are cyclic and you just go through doubt moments. (Supervisor M, I/V3, Q2: 4-6)

Here Supervisor M chooses not to intervene in the student’s own process/struggle to become ‘an authority’. He presents the student’s journey as a unique learning process and acknowledges that he must rely on her to construct her own sense of authority and free herself from his. Drawing from this, and in Sofoulis’ (1997) words, it can be suggested that Psycho-Supervision goes about creating “a space in which two subjectivities/intellects must necessarily interact so that the project of one may be brought to completion” and that “through the supervisory process it is possible to fulfil the goal of enabling students to discover their “own standpoint”, to be given recognition for their “own work”, and to express ideas in their “own voice” (p. 11).

In the psychoanalytic discourse, because transparency is momentary and the mystery element is pervasive, the intensely-felt nature of student-supervisor relations remains somewhat unfathomable. If and when a student experiences the supervisor’s authority as overbearing, they may well decline to ask questions or challenge that power, and/or become passive and detached.

52 Perhaps the supervisor is endorsing the psychoanalytic idea of letting the student reach an optimal frustration level in which the student has to face their demons/shadows to be transformed. I also made the point in “Under author-isation” that this notion of authority suggests that they may be becoming authorities with a masculinist sense of autonomous authority.
Radical (Rad) discourse

Efforts to be transparent in Rad-Supervision are accomplished by opening up social differences and explicating their impact on supervisor-student relations. In parallel with this, feedback is offered in a ‘conversational’ way in which the supervisor, as well as affirming the student, situates her own train of thought besides that of the student:

X tends to use a whole range of different feedback strategies. Sometimes X’ll just put a happy face: “Yeah, this is a good idea, I like this”. ... What I really like about the way X gives feedback on writing is that she’s obviously thinking aloud while she’s writing. ... So she doesn’t direct you in where you should be going. She more explores it with you and thinks aloud and goes off on her own little paths and if you choose to follow that path, or if you can see something that’s valuable in heading off in that direction. So she’ll write a whole screed, a whole page of something and within that she’ll say: “You really need to go and look at so and so”. Sometimes she’ll say: “No, you’ve got this all wrong, go back and re-read that, because what you’ve said so and so is saying isn’t really what they’re saying at all.” You can go back and you can argue with her - you can say: “Well this is what I mean they’re saying.” But more often then not, she is right ... or, she’ll sort of wander off ... It’s almost like having a conversation on a page. Where she leaves room for you to [decide], where she could go off in three different directions on the page and you can choose. ... So you get lots of little entry points if you like. (Student H, I/V1, Q2A: 102-132)

Mystery plays out in this terrain in the sense that the power relations that are at the heart of supervision can never, in fact, be fully known or articulated, are inherently unstable, and are not amenable to rational inquiry. They thus threaten to disrupt the efforts of both supervisor and student in unpredictable and possibly unrecognised ways. The supervisor may be oblivious to or disconcerted by the impact of her power and how it may disrupt communication:
I’m also therefore often unconscious of the institutional status that I might have and the awe. It shocks me to the core really. “Hey? Me? Don’t be silly!” So, that’s so alien to me, I don’t have a feel for that, which means of course it’s highly possible, that some of my honours, some of PhD students may well be unable to say [what doesn’t work]. They’re all bloody stronger than me, they’ll come and beat me up. (Supervisor F, I/V1, Q3D: 155)

Grant (2005a) suggests that there “has been an effort on the part of the Rad-Supervisor, and sometimes the Rad-Student, to … establish a non-hierarchical, even power-free, relationship with the other” (p. 344). This is again reflected by Supervisor F who says:

I expect my students to shape the agenda around meetings. I expect them to come in with their issues and questions. I don’t expect to have to set up some kind of exam or test to see what they’ve been doing. I will repeatedly, boringly probably reiterate again and again and again. “I am just an intelligent reader, this is how I read it, you take from this what you think works for you. It is your choice, it is your decision, it is your thesis. You must be happy with the decisions that you are taking, my role is to give you advice.” So I constantly do that kind of talk that reminds them all the time that they are not there to get a tick from me, or a gold seal of approval or whatever, and then it’s done. And often we will be working at cross purposes, students will say: “I can’t submit this”. And I’ll say: “Oh, yes you can. It’s fine.” Their doubt is fairly acute on occasions. (Supervisor F, I/V3, Q17: 91)

It is noticeable that in this extract a protective/encouraging tone operates alongside the collegial ‘egalitarian’ one. In the former, the supervisor is heard encouraging and directing her students both to rely on their own judgments and trust her assurances that the thesis is ready. In the latter, she offers choices and lets the student make decisions about topics and arguments. Added to this complexity, this supervisor also recognises that the process of

53 Here we see a neo-liberal discourse intersecting with a radical discourse.
feedback can never be transparent because she cannot know how students will read her comments or ensure that they will be taken in the way she intended:

It's not often that students will come back to me and say: “I didn’t like what you did to me”. On the flip-side they will come back and say: “I tried that and it worked really well”. So, maybe I ought to take some comfort that some things are working. I would hope that if there were an issue or problem that students would feel comfortable about coming back, but one of the intangibles there is I have no way, I have little way of ensuring that students read me the way I want to be read. (Supervisor F, I/V1, Q3D: 155)

In these excerpts we see evidence that mystery remains a constant companion. Here again, the inescapable power relations produce expectations that may remain invisible to students and even more so to the supervisors themselves.

On transparency and mystery - tacit assumptions about the feedback process

I now illustrate how transparency and mystery influence the ways in which supervisors and students judge, respond, act, feel, show (dis)approval and take pleasure. I suggest two underlying assumptions about feedback practices and propose that they influence knowledge construction, subject formation, and the establishment and maintenance of student-supervisor relations. The first of these is that communication between students and supervisors about feedback can be explicit and transparent. The second is that feedback can be ‘exchanged’ and negotiated in a relational, equal/reciprocal and collegial manner. In this discussion I concentrate particularly on negotiations regarding how the draft is to be read and responded to and the ease or difficulty with which students are able to take up the supervisor’s suggested changes. I rely
heavily on the comments of Supervisor F who responded in detail to the questions bearing on this issue. Her notions pose the issues at stake particularly well.

The illusion of transparency in communication

I have suggested that the current institutional ethos presumes that communication between students and supervisors is transparent in the sense that it is seen to be a reasoned process and it is felt that its meanings can be made explicit. Implicit in this view is the notion that students can ‘invite’ the kind of feedback they desire and supervisors can reciprocate by ‘knowing’ what kind of feedback students need. To achieve transparency in student-supervisor relations, institutional codes of practice, and, more generally models of ‘good’ supervision, recommend the regular practice of clarifying expectations and the joint establishment of goals.

In the following statement, the supervisor recognises the possibility of a mismatch between feedback and expectations but suggests it can be relatively easily fixed:

I think often feedback is pitched at the wrong level because what the supervisor is expecting the student to deliver and what the student is expecting to deliver are mismatched and you [the supervisor and the student] can solve that problem so easily just by communicating clearly.

(Supervisor F, I/V3, Q18: 92)

When asked how easy it was to provide such feedback, and whether the student was likely to receive it in the spirit in which it was offered, this supervisor was more equivocal:

I can’t answer that simply. [It] depends very much on what that relationship between the supervisor and the student is doing and what its terms are. So if it is a relationship of peers, and if it is a relationship of trust, then I think feedback is actually quite an easy thing to do. Because
what it requires is that I act as intelligent reader of their work. And so what I am feeding back to them is what I have read from their work. If you’re not having to deal with defensiveness, and you’re not having to deal with “please be my mummy” kind of relationships and none of that crap is there, that prevents the feedback being heard in the manner in which it’s delivered, or prevents the feedback being used constructively, if none of that’s there then I find it’s a relatively easy task. (Supervisor F, I/V3, Q6: 19)

In this extract, the radical discourse is invoked with the expectation of student and supervisor being peers. At the same time the psychoanalytical tradition is present with the reference to a maternal transference. In this way the student is cast as either an equal in a relationship of peers or an infantile state of dependency. This dichotomy privileges open feedback and expects it to be delivered and received in an ‘adult’ and collegiate way. Ignored are the slippages in communication and meaning that can occur in any act of communication, let alone one fraught with personal and political meaning for at least one partner.

The illusion of equality and reciprocation
In further considering the student’s response, Supervisor F recognised this issue and elaborated on it at some length. Here she focused on the possible defensiveness of the student, suggesting that:

But [the feedback process] can be complicated by ego, it can be complicated by fear and anxiety, by a sense of desperation about whether you can or can’t do this. So a comment becomes a criticism, very easily, not necessarily in the way in the way it’s spoken, it can in the way it’s spoken but also in the way it’s read. And then it can become a very hard task to find exactly the right words. Especially if you know the student is already predisposed that way towards you [i.e. is overly sensitive or dependent on the supervisor’s authority]. And then yes it’s the hardest and scariest thing that you ever do, because you want to be absolutely sure that you’re heard, but in order to be heard, you have to find the way
to communicate it [so] that they will listen to and that they won’t shut off. And the more I supervise, the more you hit different personalities that have got both particular kinds of baggages and they are very hard to scout around. (Supervisor F, I/V3, Q6: 19)

These comments suggest that powerful unconscious dimensions may be relived each time work is submitted and returned, and that feedback can be read/heard and put to use as it was intended only when students are clear about their needs and can be detached from comments on their work. What blocks feedback, distorts communication and makes supervision difficult is attributed to students’ desires for a dependent parental relationship (rather than, for example, any confusion on the part of the supervisor). I note here that Frow (1988) comments on the “special problems of female supervisors … because they are often required to serve in an overdetermined … maternal role to female students” (p. 319). The supervisor emerges in a somewhat ‘all knowing’ but not ‘all powerful’ position as she reflects on the possibility of her clear communication on the one hand, and the possibility of student’s variable reactions on the other.

In the above comment the psychoanalytic discourse can be heard in relation to the supervisor’s reference to use of “baggages” and personality types. But while this supervisor is aware of the students’ over-investment in her authority and power, but she cannot see that there may be a counter-transference phenomenon whereby she attributes dependency to student personality rather than ascribing their reactive, rebellious or vulnerable response to her institutional power. My concern here is that it is problematic for a structurally subordinate student to be treated as a colleague in one moment and then be expected to be compliant in another.

Students are less sanguine about the possibility of reciprocation and equality and may look at the same tangle from a very different perspective. Student G, for example, was quite explicit about the limits to transparency and hence her need to work within and around the forces at play in the supervisory relationship:
Yes I do refrain from discussing the effectiveness of the feedback (when it’s not working) due to the nature of the relationship. For me, there is too much at risk if it’s all honest and open. It’s damaging to compromise the relationship because of the power relations and the fact the student is reliant on the supervisor to endorse the readiness of the thesis for submission. The closest thing I can do to address this is to ask for specific feedback so I do this in different ways and I use this as a tactic. (Student G, I/V3, Q5: 21)

This student’s reservations illustrate that transparency may be more ‘costly’ to the subordinate than the superordinate party. She opts to minimise this by asking for specific feedback and thus protects herself from being “all honest and open”. In asking for the feedback she desires, she is exercising some control over a process that she realises needs her careful and considered strategising. Mystery exists alongside this pragmatic strategy in that she keeps what she is doing to herself and maintains the relationship at arms length. In this case at least there is an ambiguity at the core of the student-supervisor relationship.

My data suggests that, appealing as they are as educational principles, clear communication and reciprocity are highly problematic. To the extent that there are matched expectations and feedback is clear, transparency is possible. However, when there is murkiness, produced, for example by, student guardedness and supervisors’ prevarications, then we have the uncertainties of mystery. That there is likely to be such uncertainty is embedded in the opacity of the feedback process. As one supervisor commented:

Well, it would be very nice to know what sort of feedback students in general found helpful. Because there’s no doubt that from one’s own students you don’t get the full story. I think very few would say: “I’m absolutely sick of what you’re telling me.” (Supervisor B, I/V1, Q3D: 106)
I suggest, then, that there is room for only a qualified optimism concerning the prospects of clear communication patterns that are equal and reciprocal. Students are more attuned than supervisors to the effects of the power differential and can be more guarded around communications, especially when directly or indirectly appraising supervisory feedback. We saw earlier how a Psy-Supervisor explicitly asks students for feedback on her feedback as a way of being transparent and challenging the power framework, and yet we see here that students will hold back from making such comments because too much is at stake for them. Every attempt at transparency invokes the potential for mystery. Hence, communication of feedback necessarily lies in a zone of uncertainty.

Concluding reflections

Despite the qualifications raised so far, the interview responses suggested that the supervisors and students in this study “were quietly achieving co-operative models of interaction” (Bartlett & Mercer, 2000: 199). Supervisors reflected critically on their practices and felt they could generally provide feedback that matched what students wanted. The student participants were extremely positive about their experiences, but also able to resist their supervisors’ professional judgments, although with certain caveats as I discuss below.

Recognising these positives is an important way of disrupting/interrupting the dominant construction of the PhD experience as one of immense suffering in which the “construct of the isolated, misunderstood genius [is] so popular as a romantic narrative of masculinity” (Bartlett & Mercer, 2000: 199). This is not to deny the problems, frustrations, contradictions and tensions which have been documented here, but to provide a corrective to the restrictive “hero”, “tragedy” or “penal” storylines as Ylijoki (2001) calls them, which have a secure holding in supervision narratives.
Nevertheless, there is a need to be circumspect about the positives pertaining to supervision that can be extrapolated from this research. As already indicated, the gap between practice and intention means that a supervisor’s pedagogy is necessarily elusive:

Yes, I mean I feel really strongly about [making explicit that students must experience themselves as in control, as author of their intentions]. But I don’t know that the students would always say that my practice follows my intentions. (Supervisor Q, Post-meeting I/V2, Q12: 43)

Further, and as I have argued, because of the unequal power relationships in terms of both institutional standing and academic expertise, students’ ability to challenge their supervisor’s expert knowledge is constrained, as is their autonomy. In this study, students sometimes expressed ambivalence towards their supervisor’s feedback, and spoke of developing diplomacy or devising other tactics to obtain the feedback desired. It was pragmatism that helped students manage the inbuilt opacity of the process, such as when the comments appeared to be pointing in different directions or requiring different responses.

In discussing the co-existence of transparency and mystery, I suggest that on the part of students the desire for transparency is fuelled by anxiety about the research/writing process and/or the examination process. On the part of supervisors it derives from various models of ‘good’ supervision and their own desires to see a thesis through to successful completion. The current faith that transparency is (almost) completely possible is disturbing: it implies that supervisors and students can be in control of the research/writing process and that they should be able to manage the conduct of their relations in a rational and efficient manner. The risk is that this faith may suggest that these are the only ways of creating academic products and conducting student-supervisor relations. Hence it is important to recognise that doubt and uncertainty go with the territory of supervision. In brief, I am arguing for the importance of
recognising that for every move towards transparency, there is a counter move towards mystery.

Many of the examples cited here have shed light on the limitations of transparency in the zone of communication. More broadly Grant (2003) has noted that “[c]ontemporary theories of language and communication emphasise ‘the abyssal space’ (Readings, 1996) between self and other in every moment of dialogue. In this sense, no communication can be guaranteed in its transparency” (Grant, 2003: 190). This suggests that being separated by the “abyssal space” we are fractured, divided and unknowable one to the other.

My discussion indicates that the elements of mystery are well embedded in the two dominant discourses of supervision - the traditional-academic (Trad-ac) and the psychological (Psy), as well as the emergent psychoanalytic (Psycho) and the radical (Rad) formations. Drawing from the data, I have suggested that mystery derives from the fact that supervisors can never really know what feedback students find helpful or unhelpful, and they cannot ever really know if they are being read the way they want to be read. I also highlighted how mystery persists alongside notions of communication, objectivity and equality. My argument is that its presence needs to be recognised and accepted. I also recognise that there are limits to this. If a student were to simply accept that feedback is opaque, or to be too daunted by their supervisor’s authority to ask questions or challenge it, passivity and subservience are the result and, without the language of transparency, difficult to challenge.

The complex and dynamic power relations between student and supervisor influence the interactions between them as well as the intersection between transparency and mystery. These interactions may work out in unintended ways, especially where different discourses are being enacted between the parties in the supervision pair. This may explain the swinging feelings detected in the interview responses:
And so I’ve always managed to have good relations. Now at times though I think a postgrad relationship with a supervisor … goes through euphorias and then it plunges into … we can’t bear the sight of each other. But it’s unspoken. I mean well I find with mine, it’s like you’re aware there are tensions in the relationship and you know it’s because of the stress of the postgrad and then it comes out of it. There’s troughs and peaks, and mostly I would say that my students think I’m fine and we get on OK. That doesn’t mean that I’m a perfect supervisor for them. But I’ve never had anybody feel as though they couldn’t work with me and they had to find another supervisor or anything like that. I think with some it’s just a more successful supervision than others. (Supervisor Q, I/V1, Q3C: 164-174)

This supervisor’s view echoes those of many others who saw supervision as having a dynamic nature - being highly variable, changeable and prone to mood swings. These splittings and slippages can also be seen as effects of the contradictory aims produced by institutional expectations and prescriptions. Graduate students’ formation as particular kinds of scholarly selves is a fraught process because students have unequal control of knowledge and how it is produced, yet they are individually and personally accountable for the quality of the thesis.

In conclusion, then, the crux of my argument is that the current institutional focus on outcomes and thesis product risks reducing the research process with its inherent elements of mystery to a technical-rational and orderly experience of completing milestones. In this way, it ignores the fact that the research/writing process has unique and idiosyncratic elements in each and every case. Instead it imposes uniform assumptions about autonomy, authorship and originality on the highly differentiated.

Against this, I suggest we should live with the intersections of transparency and mystery if we are to more realistically accept the productivities and limits of supervision. Perhaps in considering the complexities of supervision and the feedback process as being in-between - or simultaneously within - transparency and mystery, strategies can be found that do not force us to
choose between them. For it is in the intractable, ‘swampy’ and uncertain terrain between transparency and mystery that the ‘reality’ of supervision lies. In thinking about supervision this way, it becomes possible to reconfigure the feedback process as one that needs to be flexible and open-ended and tolerant of ambiguity. Here there is an acceptance of the fact that supervision entails a constant process of reflection regarding such uncertainties (Aspland, 1999). And in understanding the processes involved we need a finely-grained analysis that provides a nuanced representation of the lived experiences of supervision and the pedagogical practices that support them. These are the ‘murmurs’ alluded to in my title to this chapter.

This title also points to the institutional silences around the difficulties of supervision. It suggests that the aversion to uncertainty pushes complexities ‘underground’ and privileges certain kinds of behaviours and makes certain kinds of scholarly identities more likely than others. “Murmurs” refer to the sounds we may hear from students whose difficulties remain unarticulated and who are frustrated by what they cannot understand or speak about. Some of those murmurs refer to muffled voices competing to be heard over louder noises. Some are also from supervisors who want to transform traditional supervision pedagogies now long overdue for critique. Together these murmurings are unsettling the status quo and providing the means to shift the discursive realms of practice to transform the established boundaries between them. It is hoped that new discourses will enter the pedagogical arena unsettling dominant moods and introducing new modes of supervisory discourse.
Chapter 9

Getting some distance on the playings-out of textual closeness within supervision

the author as student:
Supervisor X had read the draft [of my proposal]. She said it read well and there was an argument and that I had come down on the side of ‘close’ personal relationships. We discussed the meanings of ‘close’.

(Journal entry, meeting 6 with supervisor 11/6/97)

the supervisor of the author:
I really hope you aren’t too exhausted and that the session didn’t leave you flat. I feel worried about talking too much and ‘over’ whatever your kind reassurances.

(email to student author 3/4/2007)
Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I start by commenting on my methodology and modes of interpretation and then provide a brief summary of the thesis. After this, I describe four major themes underlying the entire thesis - (1) asymmetrical but relational power, (2) the tension in the supervisor’s position as both ‘pastor’ and ‘critic’, (3) the tension between the promotion of authorship/autonomy and the preservation of the canon, (4) emotional and affective investments. Finally, I consider some of the strengths and limitations of the study as well as suggesting areas for future research.

Methodology and interpretation: a worm’s-eye view

Pedagogy as a social relationship is very close in. It gets right in there - in your brain, your body, your heart, in your sense of self, of the world, of others, and of possibilities and impossibilities in all those realms. (Ellsworth, 1997: 6)

In using a ‘worm’s-eye view’ methodology I have provided a series of close-ups of feedback relations in doctoral supervision. In each of the data chapters a different snapshot of supervision is taken by working at the micro-level of analysis and considering power from the bottom up. This mode of analysis considers supervision from a humble, low position in my various positions as researcher/analyst/author. This was accomplished by ‘getting up close and textual’ through using finely-grained analytical and interpretive methods to work with the texts gathered for this interview study.

In performing the close readings of small fragments of text, I considered the data in terms of a triangular relationship between supervisor and student; supervisor and text; and student and text. In using a triadic view I have tried to capture multiple meanings of ‘getting up close and textual’ and to capture some of the ambiguities involved, for as Grant suggests:
This makes the relations of supervision unstable: just who is relating to whom or what at any given moment? This confusion is expressed in the question commonly asked over what is being supervised, student or research. (2005b: 200)

As far as relations between supervisor and student are concerned, I have suggested that their protracted and intensely intersubjective relations are characterised by a unique blending of the personal and intellectual (Grant, 2005b). This makes supervision a privatised and individualised pedagogy which is far more than merely being “a matter of scientific expertise and academic interest in the topic” (Salmon, 1992: 21).

In line with the ethos of the ascendant psychological discourse, this closeness may entail “a very personal, often very intimate, kind of communication” (Salmon, 1992: 21). [As revealed in Chapter 8, this contrasts with Trad-Supervision which believes that personal matters “have no place in supervision” (Grant, 2005a: 346)]. It requires the supervisor to ‘know’ individual students and for students to ‘know’ their supervisors because who the other is and how they act towards each other carries significant meanings. Both parties bring their bodies and minds into the private realm of the supervisor’s office because “supervision is a process that engages both the supervisor and the student as whole (complex and contradictory) persons” (Grant, 2001: 23).

In respect to the relations between supervisor and text I have drawn attention to the ways in which supervisors ‘discipline’ students’ texts in both of the meanings Foucault denoted for this term. That is, they are required to abide by disciplinary conventions since the supervisor and student operate within disciplinary formations which circumscribe what counts as intelligible and proper. Supervision itself can be understood as a kind of disciplinary process in which the supervisor shapes up the student’s capacities in certain ways (Knowles, Grant, Woods, Morrison, & Schulz, 2004). This brings into view the
academic management for ensuring the text’s adherence to disciplinary standards. In ‘getting up close and textual’ with supervisors’ accounts of their practices of feedback, I have also been able to show how supervisors enact feedback from the immediate and material experience of reading student writing.

Finally, with respect to the student’s relation to their work, the process of thesis writing engages them in a struggle to make meanings and develop a scholarly identity as they become authorised. In being close to the text they are authoring, students may become anxious about their supervisor’s influence, because in this process, a student must construct a sense of authority and use her unfolding process of learning to free herself of the need for the supervisor’s authority. However, because each student has a unique learning process, they acquire self-confidence and overcome self-doubt about the quality of their work at different rates. Further, their close relations to their texts are seen in the nature of their authorial decision-making processes and the tensions of getting it ‘right’. For example, the faith in transparency suggests that if students acquire the ‘right’ skills and make the ‘right’ choices the research/writing process and emergent thesis text can be properly managed. As well as this, transparency is expected to give students a clear picture of who they are as pedagogic, literate and disciplinary subjects.

Underpinning each of these considerations, my analysis suggests that while a student is writing the thesis text and working closely with a supervisor, the supervisor’s words and thoughts come to be closely involved in the process of generating and reproducing knowledge. In this way the text is crafted from the input of two (or more) authorial contributors.

Summary of thesis

I now provide a brief summary of each of the data chapters before presenting the major themes which have emerged from this research.
In Chapter 4, “Under pressure”, I focused on the disciplinary techniques that have emerged to procure and promote efficient student writing. The data and literature presented in this chapter pointed to increasing institutional surveillance of supervisors and students. I argued that this new era of ‘hyper efficiency’ has produced a discourse of risk management and surveillance, control and manageability and rational planning. This, I suggested, was underpinned by a sense that there was a ‘right’ way to supervise and experience candidature. The reasoning implicit in this discourse is that, through making its subjects amenable to ‘management’ and by requiring their ‘responsible’ conduct, risks/problems could be avoided. Throughout the thesis I have suggested that no such effects can be guaranteed.

The literature and data presented in this chapter also suggested that the new time pressures are likely to have an impact on the quality, depth, and usefulness of supervisory feedback. Furthermore, some supervisors were troubled by the feasibility of meeting their institutional responsibilities. They and the students in this study often reflected on the domestic and personal realities that inhibited the smooth and punctual delivery of their work.

In Chapter 5, “Under the wing”, I drew on Foucault’s concept of pastoral power to provide a way of theorising how relations of mutual dependence and autonomy played out in supervision. Here supervision is expected to combine honesty and trust, empowerment and autonomy, open communication, cooperation and equality. Just as important, in their pastoral role supervisors must gather knowledge to discover truths about their students, making them knowable, thereby making them sites of intervention. Drawing from the interview data I suggested such notions disguise the complexities involved in providing feedback. These - as discussed in more detail in Chapter 8 - include withholding and tailoring feedback as much as transparency and equality.

A second issue for Chapter 5 thus concerned the limits of the pastoral repertoire and the unpredictable and unknowable domain of intersubjective relations. The data suggested that, when there are mismatched expectations, being taken ‘under the wing’ can lead to painful contradictions and
disappointments, or a loss of faith - in the work, in the self, in the supervisor. This alerts us to the fact that any undue privileging of the intersubjective can distort other dimensions, such as the need for impersonality and detachment when assessing students’ writing. I suggested that although the need for ‘emotional work’ complicates supervisors’ need for detachment, the former should be understood as an important complement to disciplinary work; that both should be openly treated and discussed (within the limitations that constrain this); and that the two should be seen as complementary rather than oppositional.

Chapter 6, “Under author-isation”, explored issues and tensions in supervision around ownership. It also touched on the complexities of attributing knowledge creation to specific individuals in a dyadic relationship in which the student is subject to the supervisor’s control and dependent on their feedback. The discussion focussed on whether the pressure to be an autonomous scholar placed an excessive burden of self-responsibility on students. I suggested that the varying expectations of autonomy (often tacitly formed) influenced how much help students accepted and how much the supervisor provided. The data suggested that students were able to exercise a significant degree of control over their texts. However, the often covert nature of the power hierarchy - and the ways in which supervisors can use powers of office, persuasion, ‘ethos’ and even ‘kindliness’ to prompt and encourage particular intellectual practices - also made it difficult for students to challenge supervisory knowledges. The data also suggested that providing feedback was a volatile exercise as it drew student and supervisor into a tangle of decisions about text, identity, knowledge, truth and authority.

Again, in Chapter 7, “Under offer”, the analyses of supervisor responses used Foucault’s concept of pastoral power to understand the supervisors’ explicit cueing for students to take ownership/responsibility for their decisions. In supervision, the practice of ‘under offering’ by which supervisors’ feedback assumes an invitational rather than a directive character also involves supervisors distancing themselves from some of the attributes of their position (enforcer of the canon, arbiter of students’ texts for example). At
the same time, students are obligated to take up ‘the offer’ in certain ways, and this makes certain decisions on the part of students more likely than others. I mapped three different dimensions of ‘choice’ in the ‘under offering’ repertoire. My discussion also considered how the strategy of ‘under offering’ favoured the canon over ownership/autonomy or integrated the two in particular contexts.

The data suggested that in the beginning phases of the research an ‘open’ invitational form of choice was the most common of the three dimensions as a means of reinforcing students’ sense of ownership and autonomy. In the middle stages it was the second layer of negotiated or conditional choice that was paramount. In the final stages, ‘constrained’ choice most clearly came into play when the student’s successful examination was seen to be at risk. Yet, even in the most constrained field of choice, it is still the student who had the final say on their texts, including the decision to submit the thesis without supervisory approval. Thus, the power relationship between student and supervisor is both asymmetrical and relational – that is, it is both hierarchical and interactive – and the student can modify the responses of the supervisor as well as the supervisor modifying the students’ responses. ‘Under offering’ illustrates how both these processes are simultaneously at work. Complicating these matters, I suggested that the exercise of power is never straightforward, is opaque and ambiguous and susceptible to misunderstanding and change.

The relationship between the more ‘transparent’ and the more ‘mysterious’ elements that characterise student-supervisor relations and their textual relations were the subject of Chapter 8 “Underground murmurs”. The discursive traditions described by Grant (2005a) and used in my analysis indicated that the elements of mystery were well embedded in the two dominant discourses of supervision – the traditional-academic (Trad-ac) and the psychological (Psy), as well as the emergent psychoanalytic (Psycho) and the radical (Rad) formations. Because of the unavoidable co-existence of transparency and mystery, I argued that an emphasis on either transparency or mystery alone was problematic: while one risked masking the politics of
knowledge-production, the other may exaggerate them. I suggested that on the part of students, the desire for transparency was fuelled by anxiety about the research/writing process and/or the examination process. On the part of supervisors, the desire for transparency derived from various models of ‘good’ supervision and their own desires to see a thesis through to successful completion. But when it positions research/writing as a rational process to be negotiated and managed, it oversimplifies, even denies, the less tangible aspects of the process.

In terms of mystery, my data suggested that the power relations that epitomise supervision can never, in fact, be fully known or articulated, are inherently unstable, and are not amenable to rational inquiry. The data also suggested that the notions of clear communication and reciprocity are highly problematic. While transparency is possible to the extent that there are matched expectations and feedback is clear, when there is murkiness, produced by student guardedness and supervisors’ prevarications, then we have the uncertainties of mystery. Students were pragmatic about their limited autonomy and constrained ability to challenge their supervisor’s feedback. Students sometimes expressed ambivalence towards their supervisor’s feedback, and spoke of developing diplomacy or devising other tactics to obtain the feedback desired.

For supervisors, I suggested that mystery derives from the fact that supervisors can never really know what feedback students find helpful or unhelpful, and they cannot ever really know if they are being read the way they want to be read. Their responses thus also highlighted how mystery persists alongside notions of communication, objectivity and equality. From this reading, I proposed that the practice of supervisory feedback will always involve opacity, inequality and intangibility.

Overall, my framework of analysis suggests that supervision involves close watching and surveillance, intimate relations that rely on intersubjective and intellectual capacities, and brief moments of equality. Because it is subject to different personal, disciplinary and institutional agendas, it also prone to
multiple strains and tensions. These play out differently within every supervision relation and mediate the production of the text, as I now discuss.

Four major themes: tensions and issues

In the following section I elaborate on four major themes that have woven their way through the thesis and informed each of the chapters discussed above. They emerge from, and build on, the theoretical material discussed in Chapter 2. They are: the power relations between supervisor and student; the supervisor’s role as pastor and critic; student autonomy and the canon; and emotional and affective investments on the part of both student and supervisor.

Asymmetrical but relational power

In this thesis strands of Foucaultian thought have been used to illuminate the asymmetrical relationship between student and supervisor. Feedback relations were shown to involve several kinds of asymmetry - in knowledge, in status, in identities, in rights and obligations. Differentials in knowledge and status are due to the certified, institutional position the supervisor occupies. Differences in identities are due to different social positionings, and differences in rights and obligations to the variations in understandings of institutional and personal responsibilities. In essence, when the supervisor provides scholarly feedback, it is spoken with authority and its expertise can impair the student’s capacity to speak back. For in a supervisor-directed talking space, a student is mindful that they are subject to the supervisor’s knowledge and their certified claim to know. The positive or productive effects of these relations include the fact that they ‘empowered’ students as knowers, enhanced their sense of personal control, pleasure and desire. In this sense it can be argued that the “institutionally mediated asymmetry between supervisor and student is productive even as it is problematic” (Grant, 2005b: 212).
I also suggested that the power relations within supervision tend to be disguised and hidden, not least because supervision is a conversational style pedagogy with its informality masking the power differentials at work. In tandem with this, I have proposed that power is disguised by the rational and expert form in which advice is delivered, the pastoral elements of supervision, the academic ethos insisting on the autonomy of the student, and the individuated responsibilities attributed to scholarship. In addition, the arguments in Chapter 8 suggest that the relative invisibility of the power differential between supervisor and student is constituted by the pervasiveness of the psychological discourse “with its heightened attention to close contact, support etc and more emphasis on ‘relationship’” (Grant, 2005b: 138). In line with this, most of the students in this study understood power relations to be neutralised by the collegial treatment they received. This decentring of the supervisor’s power helps maintain the fiction that the student is working - and can in fact work - autonomously. It also protects the view that student-supervisor relations can and should be enacted as straightforward, reciprocal and amicable ‘exchanges’ between speaking equals.

It is then not surprising that, in the interviews, the power hierarchy was only explicitly mentioned when students or supervisors felt abuses of power had occurred or ‘overfeedback’ had been offered. In Stanley’s words: “it was only when the supervisory relationship ‘broke down’ that the machinations of power became more visible” (2004: 204). Examples of breakdowns in relations were reported by students when supervisors took control of their texts or dismissed what they wanted to say. In the words of Student G:

W [names Master’s supervisor] hardly allowed me any space at all to do my own work and almost everything, that was “overfeedback” really, because almost everything I wrote W sort of rephrased and W had a major hand in the writing of it. (Student G, I/V1, Q1B: 34-36)
Supervisors talked about breakdowns when they had insisted the student did more work or when students were perceived to be avoiding doing the work. In Supervisor F’s experience:

I am in a conflict situation with one of my PhD students (R). And I don’t know, again, I suspect that really … that’s about their problem. This is a student who is an academic at an institution. I mean working full-time, and family and things. So huge reasons as to why she couldn’t produce. But who I think also did not want to hear what I was saying to her about the nature of her thesis that she could write on the basis of the data that she had. And had a vision of herself as some great theoretician and didn’t like me saying … I’d prefer it if you would write the thesis and get it done. That is what you have to do because you’re under pressure from your institution to get it completed. You’ve made them all these promises that you would [can’t keep]. You cannot produce anything so sophisticated and R not wanting to hear that. Which actually is you know not uncommon. A lot of students say: “I’m going to be finished in two months”. And I’ve learned to say: “Oh I’m glad that’s what you think.” Knowing that it takes … and knowing that they can’t hear that … because they underestimate just how much fine-tuning goes into the [final thesis, it’s] incredibly time-consuming … (Supervisor F, I/V1, Q3D: 157)

Supervisors talked about colleagues who abused their power. In the following account of the maltreatment of students by supervisors and the institutional silence that perpetuates this, the same supervisor as before explains her anger towards colleagues who she believes exploit their students:

Four or five times I suppose, I’ve either picked up a student … that somebody has abandoned or who has abandoned the supervisor after a long and difficult relationship. Or I’ve taken on a student while someone’s been on leave or something like that and, who hadn’t or … and had to do all of that kind of process stuff in a very short space of time. And, just that sense that some students have been really short-changed. So I find it really frustrating because of institutional politics certain individuals who
are appalling supervisors, are held up as stars because they happen to be the kind of despotic ... non-participatory, self-centred individuals. [And when it] really comes down they shouldn’t be allowed near students. And the institution won’t do anything about it ... because they are protected. I get really depressed ... students have to individually, every single one of them, go through the process, come through the other side, get damaged, come out the other side, get rejected. (Supervisor F, I/V1, Q3B: 109)

The assumptions about collegiality and student autonomy mentioned above may help to explain another finding of the study - namely, that supervisors were more open to talking about their enabling/developmental/pastoral caring than their disciplinary roles. There was consensus that they should not (evidently) direct students in what to think. Nevertheless, the supervisors clearly did have ideas about ‘right’ (and less right) ways to think, infused with particular notions of disciplinary scholarship. This was to be encouraged by a ‘non-directive’ approach in which the supervisor engaged with the student’s text, asked questions, pushed for clarification, and prompted further investigations. They thus followed the pattern whereby the caring supervisor is “nevertheless ‘master’, in control” (Johnson et al., 2000: 142).

In contrast to many of the supervisors, most of the students had a more nuanced understanding of power. In their responses they often expressed caution, hesitancy, and deference. At this juncture, it is also important to say that all students participating in this study were basically comfortable about arguing back or rejecting their supervisors’ feedback, as shown by many of the experiences documented throughout this thesis. In Chapter 6, we saw how they weighed up the feedback and sometimes rejected suggestions. As self-reflective subjects, their active involvement in their research activities ensured that power relations are relational as well as asymmetrical. As Grant (2005b) argues, in the supervisory power/knowledge matrix, the actions of both student and supervisor are modified by the actions of the other, and “lived out in various productive but constrained ways” (p. 86). This means that despite the asymmetry of the power/knowledge axis, students can affect and mould the process. More precisely, student and supervisor can “both
modify the actions of the other” (emphasis in original, Grant, 2005b: 85). Hence:

Neither the supervisor nor student can escape the workings of power because it is the productive ground of supervision, it makes things happen, indeed it makes supervision what it is. In contrast to a view of polarised pedagogical power, ... both supervisor and student have power to act on the actions of the other - although with unpredictable and mixed effects. (Grant, 2003: 186)

In this study, examples of this bi-directional process, with students affecting supervisors as well as vice versa, were found in their dialogues around drafting and revising. In the to’ing and fro’ing of feedback and the open-endedness of the drafting process, what is worked out between them is negotiated and re-negotiated:

I have found over the years that it is no good giving oral feedback unless you give the same feedback in writing. And so that I write things down all over the text and in a couple of pages at the end of the text and then I take them through it verbally and explore and explain what I’m saying. They write little notes on the side and then they go away though with what I’ve said reinforced in writing again so that when they come, sometimes it’s not until the draft later, they come back with my writing on the draft [from] before and say: “Look you said this. Now this is what I’m going to do with that.” Or, “I don’t know what you mean”, or “Yes! but I’ve moved beyond that now.” (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q11: 42)

For the following student, her voice emerges from being prompted to express confidently what is implied or from being encouraged to pursue other angles:

So she’ll write a whole screed, a whole page of something and within that she’ll say: “You really need to go and look at so and so”. Sometimes she’ll say: “No, you’ve got this all wrong, go back and re-read that, because
what you’ve said so and so is saying isn’t really what they’re saying at all.” You can go back and you can argue with her - you can say: “Well this is what I mean they’re saying.” But more often then not, she is right ... or, she’ll sort of wander off ... It’s almost like having a conversation on a page. Where she leaves room for you to [decide], where she could go off in three different directions on the page and you can choose. ... So you get lots of little entry points if you like. (Student H, I/V1, Q2A: 102-132)

In this process, sometimes supervisors compromise when students convince them of the importance of retaining the ideas they wish to convey:

I guess the problem comes if the student is intent on holding onto sections that you can’t see the logic of and they really can’t see what you’re trying to say. Sometimes students say to me, especially mature age students: “Look I know you really don’t like this section but I’m leaving it in again because I really think it’s important”. And then I might recognise the importance in a way I didn’t before or I might say: “I still can’t see the importance of this”. Usually, I guess we arrive at some sort of compromise in that situation where the person edits back. (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q14: 45)

And students also make concessions, deciding either to give up pursuing an idea or doing further thinking and rewriting. Students would also challenge or even ignore suggestions too:

I’ve challenged X on a few things. I suppose last year when X was making changes, and they were changes to changes that he’d made already, I suppose I started to challenge X with stuff like that. But since then I don’t do it now, I’m just diplomatic I suppose and just take it on board and do it. And there’s also areas where X has suggested a change and I’ve chosen to diplomatically ignore what X said. I don’t know if X is aware that I’ve ignored it or not. (Student V, I/V3, Q4: 6)
The supervisor’s position as both ‘pastor’ and ‘critic’

In “Under the wing” we saw that an inherent tension in the supervisor’s role arises from the expectation that they will both ‘care’ for the student and provide formal and critical feedback and assessment. In this way supervisors must combine the reason of the detached assessor and the sensibilities of the pastor for their delivery of feedback to be effective. In this study the supervisors’ responses suggested that their individualised comments were carefully communicated to ensure that the student would take the desired action. Typical responses included needing to time the comments to the student’s stage of drafting and disposition (especially self-confidence), as well as moderating the amount of the feedback offered, as Supervisor Q explains:

But the critical analysis has to be one that they can manage, that they can cope with. It’s no good doing a massive critical analysis that they can’t cope with. And I have occasionally done that, like offered them too much and sometimes not enough. So it’s that judgement again about getting that balance between [the feedback and the support]. (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q10: 29)

By the same token, supervisors believed that it was important to give tough and honest feedback especially when the examination was looming:

If you’ve got hard feedback to give it’s important not to shirk it. As tough as it is, when you know it’s going to upset them. You still need to give it. It would be worse to not give the feedback. It just means you need to follow up and do a bit of TLC and care and be sure they are still all right. Because it is hard to hear … when you’re giving your all and you’re at the end of your tether and you just want it to be done. And to be told that it’s still not good enough is really tough. But it’s important that you find the way to give the honest feedback and for me that means things like suggesting solutions as well at that point. I will also usually whenever I’m in that situation also say: “It is your decision … to take or not to take the advice. It is absolutely your decision. You do have the right to submit the
thesis without the final approval of your supervisor.” (Supervisor F, I/V3, Q7: 32-34)

Many of the supervisors talked about experiences where they had seen other supervisors overemphasise, or they had themselves overemphasised, their role as critic, as Supervisor B recounted:

I think also again it came from co-supervising and sometimes thinking that another supervisor is just going too far. Saying too much so that the student withdraws or … when I think also partly not wishing to make it sound as if you think their entire writing skills are faulty and if you say too much it might sound like that. Oh well, if all that needs to be attended to it gives no hope. So I think timing of certain feedback is quite important. Not that I think I get it right. I’m just sort of aware of that not overloading. (Supervisor B, Post-meeting I/V2, Q8: 10)

But I think sometimes I get led astray a bit and do too much, but then I just get the eraser Well, it doesn’t matter if those are the words they used. I’ll wipe it off. (Supervisor B, I/V3, Q10: 12)

In their responses supervisors often showed an appreciation of the harrowing nature of the process which they themselves had experienced and they offered support and intellectual guidance to students to keep them going:

The early drafts are the most problematic where you know how far there is to go and you know that in a sense they know how far there is to go, but they’re not really quite clear about it and you’ve just got to be careful that you don’t tell them that it’s further advanced than it is or tell them it is so far to go that they feel demoralised. It’s the early drafting. (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q15: 49)
A widely held view is that ‘over-involved’ supervisors who identify too closely with their students may experience difficulty in achieving the social and emotional distance needed to carry out the intellectual tasks of guide and critic (Hockey, 1994; Lather, 1991). Here the suggestion is that the more traditional supervisor can be more objective and detached from the problem. Whatever the case, the supervisors in this study were very attuned to the difficulties of achieving an effective and sensitive interplay between detachment and closeness. In this respect, we heard numerous reflections. Typical comments included: empathising with the student’s personal difficulties while bringing them back to the work at hand, encouraging students to take the feedback constructively and promoting the understanding that the feedback is directed to building a better thesis and should not be seen as an ‘attack’ on them or their projects, and using strategies to soften the feedback such as by always coupling oral feedback with written feedback in order to diminish the ‘hyper-critical’ tone of the latter.

The study also showed that parallel difficulties arise for students as they need to learn a certain detachment from the supervisor’s comments. Any such detachment is difficult because students are so close to their texts and are/become their texts. The supervisor’s critical comments although directed to the text go to the core of the student’s being. For the most part, though, the students in this study were extremely positive about the care supervisors extended. They also felt the obligation to give a return and their desire to produce good scholarship was a strong motivating factor. Hence we heard one of the students saying that she felt guilt and disappointment when delays were experienced:

She has encouraged me to provide drafts. She's been very understanding when I haven’t been able to do that for various reasons. That’s been the biggest hurdle. ... There was guilt that I wasn’t keeping up with my own timetable and that the timetable constantly shifted. And I do feel a great sense of responsibility to try and get as much done as I can because I've had such wonderful support. ... But I do feel that when a deadline goes
past and I haven’t done it. ... I feel as though I’ve let X down and I’ve let myself down as well that I haven’t done it. (Student H, I/V3, Q2: 12-18)

The promotion of authorship/autonomy and the preservation of the canon

The supervisors in this study consistently emphasised the importance of encouraging students to be personally responsible for their choices to become self-reliant scholars. Comments such as “it’s your thesis, you decide” and “you have to be happy with the choices you make” were reiterated. I argued that to achieve this version of scholarly identity supervisors needed to pay simultaneous attention to the “re-constitution of ... student as researcher and the terms and boundaries of the discipline” (Grant, 2005b: 27). In talking about disciplinarity, authorship and autonomy supervisors shifted to a more formal register compared to their ‘caring talk’ illustrated above. This shift was highlighted in Chapters 6 and 7 where supervisors emphasised the importance of textual ownership and their obligations as promoters of authorship/autonomy and guardians of the canon.

In line with the emphasis on student autonomy, the data showed that the supervisors attempted to achieve this through a ‘non-directive’ approach. In this respect they engaged carefully with students’ text, asked questions and pushed for clarification. They reported urging students to discover/investigate for themselves, validating the student’s voice, and sanctioning the student’s personal control over their knowledge and interests. In essence, supervisors promoted the student’s autonomy through moving into the shadows, while still constraining the field of choices. This type of strategy was evident, for example, in the responses claiming to allow students to make their own decisions about how to author their texts (over matters such as style, grammar editorial decisions and argument).

Overall, and as suggested earlier on, students were pragmatic about this ‘autonomy within limits’ situation. While their desire for approval and sense of responsibility urged them to comply with supervisory requests, they also worked around their supervisors so they could be in control of their texts.
They also expressed desires to be the owners of their texts and appreciation of the spaces in which to do this. Characteristic in this respect were reflections such as “my supervisor’s allowing me my own space” and “she leaves room for me to decide” or “my supervisor gives me entry points to pursue ideas in her feedback”, and “she never directs, we have conversations”, “my supervisor won’t do the rescuing thing”.

Nevertheless, the data in Chapters 4, 6 and 8 does reveal various elements of dissatisfaction and unhappiness arising out of the disjunctions between caring, authorising and disciplining. The first relates to the gulf between the purported certainties of expert knowledge, which promise control and predictability, and students’ experience of uncertainty and contingency. This was evidenced by students’ frustration over supervisor’s feedback which was sometimes contradictory, or where they were ready to submit only to be told they needed to keep going. The second undercurrent concerns the disjunctures between the student’s sense of authority and scholarly formation and the actual process of research/writing which was invariably experienced as fractured/fragmented, unevenly acquired and subject to perpetual authorisation. Here the fact that the student had to check back with the supervisor-expert meant that there was a tension around the transition to and reliance on the student’s own expertise. The third undercurrent concerned the rupture between the student’s sense of self and the self that emerges through being subject to expert scrutiny and regulation, leading to a fragmented sense of self. This sense of disjuncture was most often recounted by supervisors whose students had received negative examiners’ reports.

Different emotional investments

The interview responses discussed in this thesis suggest that both students and supervisors bring strong emotional investments to the thesis. On the part of the student, these include the desire to be worthy of their supervisors’ approval and developing this sense in themselves, as well as investing in the topic under investigation, and learning to toughen up to become self-reliant. For supervisors, this involved strong investments in their hopes for the
students’ contribution to scholarship, and to be appreciated for enabling students to fulfil their particular aspirations as scholars.

The supervisors in this study did not work solely with questions of intellect but readily recognised students’ emotions in terms of how they impacted on the progress of the thesis and their acceptance/rejection of the feedback. Providing emotional support was a widely endorsed strategy. However, supervisors were less candid about their own emotions and investments and these were more readily discussed in relation to their enabling roles. This concentration on the emotions of the ‘other’ reinforces the asymmetrical relationship between supervisor/protector and student who is protected. Supervisors’ own emotions, however, were indirectly acknowledged in relation to their investments in the student’s work and the supervisory relationship. These responses were more prominent when the examination process was discussed as this is where supervisors felt they were being judged too. But even here there was a certain guardedness with supervisors mentioning such things as anger, frustration, or irritation as things that needed to be restrained on behalf of the student.

Emotional patterns, then, are vested in, and influenced by, the asymmetrical relation between student and supervisor. One of the consequences of this is that supervisors “can talk for” (Owler, 1999: 136) their graduate students and in speaking for them they may be representing their students’ interests and/or their own (p. 140). Thus we need to understand that “[w]hile the supervisor’s critique of the student’s work may well be valid, such critiques will always nevertheless carry an over-determined force” (Owler, 1999: 140) due to the supervisor’s “investments of desire and relations of power/knowledge” (Giblett, 1992: 140). Indeed, with more pressured time-frames, some supervisors may well resort to the practice of ‘overfeeding’. This has both emotional and intellectual consequences as Student G reflects:

And it meant that eventually I became very ... very passive I suppose in the relationship. And I actually lost a lot of confidence to the extent that
when I submitted it I really wasn’t sure that it would pass. (Student G, I/V1, Q1B: 34-36)

In such cases, there may be serious consequences for the student who can come to construe their inability to get it ‘right’ to signify their inability to work independently. This had repercussions for this student’s sense of self as author/researcher which, years later, she was ready to reappraise:

I suppose it was with the best intentions. W was benevolent and wanted to get through, but I think W saw it as something that had an end product and that was all. ... whereas I saw it much more as a process which was developmental and which didn’t necessarily finish. It wasn’t really about doing, making the dissertation pass, it was about my development as a researcher. (Student G, I/V1, Q1B: 54)

When the student considers that the supervisor goes too far and talks/writes over the student’s words to hasten the writing, the gate-keeping nature of their feedback may de-authorise/disrespect and override/negate the student’s sense of identity. The authorisation process involves specific forms of self-discipline in which students negotiate their desires with their supervisors - who they want to be, what they want to say, how they want to say it. This sets conditions for different investments (in the thesis text, the supervisor, the body of knowledge, the research/writing process and the feedback). Moreover, the elusive qualities of ‘trust’ and honesty become particularly acute in the end stages when a student is so close to their own work that they are unable to judge its quality.

Finally, the data in this study suggested that research was pleasurable as well as hard and problematic. Students (and supervisors supported this in their responses) repeatedly acknowledged the difficult and complex nature of their candidatures. The discipline of writing, the need for hard thinking and prolonged labour combined with the emotional factors that came into play and these would often feed into students’ self-doubt about whether they had
the ability to succeed. Uncertainty was widely experienced. Indeed, many of the students stated that the most surprising aspect of their candidature was discovering they could do the work.

More happily, supervisors spoke of pleasures gained from reading final drafts and their gratification from engaging with the work produced, and the enjoyment taken in celebrating this achievement:

One of the joyous, absolutely joyous things is reading final drafts, like X’s final draft and just reading page after page where you’re picking up the odd word, you’re perhaps suggesting another topic sentence ... Where basically there’s page after page after page where it’s their work and they’ve shifted it on one step further than you could ever have envisaged and there you’ve got X’s thesis. And you can recognise your own contribution in it, but it’s theirs. I have no desire to or no passion for [altering someone else’s draft]. In fact my joy is actually in thinking: “We’re there, break out the champagne!” Or I think we’re there and we’re there in every chapter except that one. (Supervisor Q, I/V3, Q14: 48)

Avenues for future research

I have tried to show that every supervision relation is fashioned differently and there is more to be seen than what is represented in this research. I have also indicated how difficult it is to delineate the slippery/ambiguous nature of power relations. One intriguing element of this relates to a possible underestimation of personal direction and/or direct textual assistance by both students and supervisors. It would be interesting to explore such issues more fully, especially because there is research suggesting that students accommodate whatever supervision is offered (Acker et al., 1994). It would be useful for any such research to include consideration of language issues, for Parry and Hayden’s (1994) study found that helping students write,
particularly CALD students, proved to be contentious, with some supervisors expending large amounts of time assisting students and worrying over how much of a contribution the supervisor should make.

In Chapter 3 I noted that the cohort investigated were likely to represent ‘successful’ partnerships (and probably able students who didn’t need too much direction or disciplining). I am curious to know how different the study would have been with students drawn from more diverse backgrounds and/or were having problematic experiences of candidature and supervision. Future studies could endeavour to “deepen our understanding of individual variation” (Patton, 1990: 17). It would, for example, be useful to explore the different meanings of feedback for different students to discern how these responses and interpretations affect the practices of writing and rewriting.

The importance of the nature and timing of feedback has been emphasised throughout this thesis. Related studies bring the same point home. According to Powels (1988), a lack of effective feedback is an important factor is students’ decisions to withdraw, particularly in their early stages of candidature (with women students over-represented). A British study on failure and lengthy candidature emphasised the problems that can occur in the final stages, arguing that: “the stage of the higher degree at which most students had given up, or over which they had spent very substantial amounts of time, was the writing up” (Rudd, 1985: 71).54 These findings raise several important questions: What encouragements in terms of feedback could have been offered at these crucial times? What sort of feedback styles do women and men find most beneficial? What kinds of help with writing could supervisors provide to best assist students at crucial stages of thesis production? Such questions are urgent given that in Chapter 4 I suggested that concern about attrition rates and completion profiles were leading to ‘safe’

54 Kamler and Thompson (2001) would argue that treating the writing in such an incidental post hoc way is problematic for research students and this would put pressure on the student. Their critique of the dismissive attitude towards writing which is connoted by the term ‘writing up’ is that this term and the behaviour it represents trivialises the integral role writing plays. The thesis, despite its elevated status, is generally seen in terms of an object which houses the material which is to be written up and in which the student merely records their research efforts.
selection practices and the subtle exclusion of students considered to be ‘at risk’.

In focusing on difference, gender, as noted above, is a crucial factor. Other variables also come into play and demand consideration. Acker (1999) for example warns that:

The literature on graduate student supervision has been remiss in not looking at race, class and age, for example, and almost as unlikely to notice whether students are fully engaged in their study or are part of what Baird calls ‘the forgotten minority’, studying part-time. (p. 87)

Little research has examined CALD postgraduate students' experiences of feedback, nor has there been an interest in the feedback practices of supervisors from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. To gain awareness of students’ diverse practices and supervision preferences it would be important to carefully identify cultural preferences for giving and receiving feedback so that variations in reading feedback can be explored.

In Chapter 3 I suggested that if a supervisor’s principle mode of relating is a directive/corrective one, students may respond passively and obediently as the ‘good student’ and let supervisors take the lead and determine what sort of feedback they need. In parallel, Grant (2005b) suggests that when there is a more improvised, dialogic mode of relating, where interactions are more equal and power is relational, power shifts around and student-supervisor dialogues become spontaneous as the pair are working creatively by generating ideas and thinking aloud together. It would be useful to consider this further together with student and supervisor estimations of where the most useful and lasting learning moments came from - not just for students but also for supervisors. Alongside this it would be interesting to do further work examining how the written feedback transacted between supervisors and postgraduates exemplifies more or less directive or dialogical practices. Finally, it would also be important and valuable to look outside the dyadic
relation to identify how the significant others who provide assistance understand and perform their roles. This group could include student learning advisers, family and friends, and peers.

Research contributions

‘Getting up close and textual’ with the study participants has enabled me to pay attention to the micro-level functionings of power and explore some taken-for-granted assumptions about supervisory feedback relations. In the close-ups featured in each of the data chapters, I have concentrated on the micro-physics of power to enter/move around in the ‘chinks and cracks’ of power relations. In approaching this topic by going ‘underground’, I have tried to bring to the surface both the predictable and anomalous elements of student-supervisor relations. I acknowledge, though, that in working closely with these texts, some elements of supervisory relations have been made conspicuous while others have been obscured and evicted. Despite my endeavours to detach/dissociate from the interview data, the commitments and blindspots I have as author/researcher/analyst will have influenced the way I selected, interpreted and read the data.

Because my research has offered theorisations of the ways academic identity is formed, texts are realised, university knowledges are produced, and social relations are negotiated, the project has been able to encompass a wide range of subject areas: namely, the areas of supervisor development, graduate education, tertiary writing, and critical literacies. Few studies in the area of feedback relations in supervision have conceived of these relations “ecosocially, as a total environment within which research activity (‘study’) is realised” (Green, 2005: 153). At a macro level, I have considered the layers of governance to which supervisors and students are subject to show that supervision is embedded within educational/institutional discourses that have shaped its contemporary cultural form, and that influence the kinds of scholarly formation, academic identities and textual products currently valued in ‘western’ cultures as doctoral education.
An important contribution this research makes to the supervision literature is the finely-grained picture it provides of student-supervisor relations and, more particularly, the actual strategies supervisors use, consciously or not, in managing the research process, encouraging students, polishing the text, and meeting deadlines. Presently, generalised theories are commonly applied when responding to student writing, largely determined by the discipline and the supervisor’s attitude to the development of writing ability.

Feedback has conventionally been narrowly conceived as a literate practice which improves students’ expression. I have argued that in conceiving it in such terms the technical-rational dimensions of textual production are emphasised, but not some of its less evident or disorderly facets. To disturb some of the received notions around power relations informing and regulating current practices of knowledge-production, my study has revealed a picture that is less orderly, transparent, reciprocal, and equal. While the practices described here may genuinely assist in the production of the text, they do so in ways in which the nature of power is often hidden. This, I have suggested, has the capacity to lead to frustration and difficulty - particularly if and when student-supervisor relations are more difficult/troubled than they generally were in this study. Furthermore, the current faith that transparency is (almost) completely possible is disturbing: it implies that supervisors and students can be in control of the research/writing process and that they should be able to manage the conduct of their relations in a rational and efficient manner. I propose therefore that the practice of supervisory feedback will always involve opacity, inequality and intangibility.

My research has endorsed the perception that feedback entails more than just disciplinary functions that prohibit transgressions or enable conventions to be followed correctly and opened up a conversation about the ways textual closeness plays out within the supervision relation in productive and problematic ways. It is now time to begin to develop alternative frameworks for exploring the relations between individuals, institutions and forms of knowledge and textual practice so that we can get some distance on
supervisors’ and students’ “standard ways of thinking and talking about the conversations we conduct in writing” (Greenhalgh, 1992: 409). Also, in breaking the silences that surround what is unspoken or has to be murmured we can begin to identify the factors that perpetuate the problematic effects of power in supervision. Such interruptions could follow on from questioning received notions such as students’ sense of obligation to get things ‘right’, and problematising assumptions that the notions of reciprocity, honesty and exchange are possible within asymmetrical relations. It is in these small places that we need to be watching closely - in the everyday interactions - where the seemingly innocuous politics of research/writing and revision are played out - whilst accepting the possibility of mystery and inexplicitness.
**Epilogue**

**Reflections on my experiences as the researcher of feedback and the student needing feedback**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professor Paul Trout:</th>
<th>the student author:</th>
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<td>Over the decades, ... instructors in higher education [have] had to make their concessions to this situation [of changing demographics and social realities in the student population]. The obvious trend has been to institute all kinds of strategies to avoid upsetting students. Some examples; ... feedback is couched in oleaninous tones; criticism, when it occurs is unctuous in its indulgence and forbearance; the Socratic method is avoided as being too inquisitorial; ... The shame inherent in the mentor-mentored relationship, which assumes that the instructor actually knows more than the student, is tempered by “equalising” strategies in which intellectual authority of the pedagogue is obfuscated. ... Another strategy to avoid shaming students is for professors to give up being the sage on the stage and become the guide on the side. No more professing like some arrogant know it-all; rather, professors now tend to listen compassionately and respectfully. (Trout, 2006: 22)</td>
<td>In Professor Paul Trout’s recent article “It’s a shame, but the truth often hurts” (2006), he argues that the new social terrain of higher education has enlisted a “compensatory and therapeutic ritual” (2006: 22) to assuage the overly-sensitive feelings of the new generation of students attending universities. He states that higher education is worthy of discomfort and damaged self-esteem. Further, he suggests that “[t]he goal should not be to banish all shame from the classroom” (p. 22) and that an academic’s job is to assist students with dealing with it and surmounting it. In my view, Professor Trout’s recommendation that students be taught strategies to ‘manage’ their shame discounts the notion of truth as an effect of power. It also perpetuates the hegemony of getting it ‘right’ which sits well within the rationally-motivated agendas of the university.</td>
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A farewelling and a greeting - from an in-between position

In this Epilogue I reflect briefly and also try to get some distance on several critical incidents marking my own experiences of candidature and supervision. First, I discuss my different supervisors as the ‘objects of analysis’ through being engaged in supervising me - a student researching feedback. Then I discuss myself as an ‘object of analysis’ through drawing on some of my experiences of responding to my supervisors’ feedback from my different positions as student, becoming writer/researcher, and author of this text. I also draw some inferences about supervisors’ different positions as writer/researchers and speculate on how such differences inform their feedback practices. I mostly restrict my comments to what is freshest in my memory while I am still in the process of the end stages of candidature. At this juncture, I find myself still in a position of being in-between (just prior to my submission and farewelling my thesis) and before meeting my examiners (who are about to greet my thesis). Finally, in the third section I try to reflect critically on how I read the power relations in my own supervision, and why it is so difficult to articulate this because of ambiguity in the supervisory dyad (within the self and within the other) since it can make us impervious to our own perspectives and assumptions. One last framing comment for this closing and farewelling to my readers is that I don’t want to paint too neat a picture of my experiences of supervision or obscure the difficult elements of the journey. Again, I invite you/the reader (as I did in the Introduction to this thesis) to revisit your own experiences of candidature and supervision. I still want to ask you to recapture this felt sense of liminality and enduring uncertainty while being in an asymmetrical power relationship.

My supervisors as objects of analysis

In this section I offer some reflections that highlight some difficulties I experienced around writing as I engaged in ‘writing and thinking’ and

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55 As I’ve been writing this I referred back to my journals and my meeting summaries to refresh my memory. My process in writing this Epilogue has been one of checking my reactions and even changing the draft and revising some of my perceptions in the light of the earlier recorded notes in my journal kept over a decade of candidature.
‘thinking and writing’ about supervision. My goal is to learn from these difficulties and to convey how challenging I found it to get the words on the paper to get them do the work I wanted them to do. I also try endeavour to understand why this important dimension i.e. the teaching of writing is backgrounded in supervision. Because I am drawing attention to some critical incidents in my candidature, this may distort the very good supervision I have experienced over this time. I also realise that my supervisors are somewhat exposed here and I do not wish them any harm by the frank nature of these comments, nor do I wish for there to be an unfavourable/favourable comparison made between the different supervision styles of my supervisors.

I often wondered how my choice of topic was impacting on my own supervision. I even worried in the early stages that my topic would backfire on my own supervisory process as initially one supervisor I thought to be rather nervous/diffident about giving me - the researcher of feedback - critical comments because this supervisor’s feedback to me - the student who needed feedback - was under scrutiny and potentially made an object of analysis. In re-reading my journal I discover that we’d discussed this and the supervisor stated in one meeting that he was nervous about his feedback due to his concern about getting it ‘right’. Through being involved in this study this supervisor was reflective about his feedback and even changed his usual way of giving feedback. He began the practice of sending summaries ahead of the meetings so there was time for me to digest and recover from the comments and for him to really think about what he wanted to say more globally.

After one of our meetings he wrote a reflection in an email to me expressing his concern about dominating the meeting. This supervisor was worried that he had talked too quickly in offering his explanation of some theoretical points as he was thinking and responding on the spot. He noted that because of the need to improvise to deal with what was being thrown up during the discussion that he may have spent too much time demonstrating his knowledge rather than inviting a dialogue which involved me. The supervisor

56 In the thesis I’ve written about the student’s need to ‘get it right’ and addressed the supervisor’s desire to ‘get it right’ to a lesser extent.
wrote about he had become conscious about how his own practices, specifically the ways he phrased his feedback through his heightened awareness of feedback and postgraduate supervision. In a subsequent meeting we discussed the supervisor’s email and I recorded the following comments in my meeting summary:

I said there was a good balance in our meetings and that I was given plenty of opportunities to talk and direct the discussion and that it was good to have his input. Supervisor E said it was a pedagogical principle and that his exercise in critical reflection was done as it had triggered these questions for him. E said he would do this from time to time. Supervisor E talked about mutual trust and acknowledged that there would inevitably be tensions, but when there was a valuing of both party’s contributions it would be possible to survive these tensions. He mentioned Hunter’s concept of pastoral pedagogy. (Meeting summary, 5/7/00)

We had many discussions like this and I felt these were really valuable ways of reflecting on the process and including both our perspectives on what was happening.

In my first few meetings with this Supervisor I wanted to do everything transparently to manage the uncertainties of doing doctoral research and working with a supervisor. This supervisor was close in age to me and I asked him to work through an “initial meetings” document which he happily did. It flagged expectations of feedback and addressed supervision obligations and ‘everything’ was made explicit. I also provided summaries of our taped meetings for my supervisors and I proposed an agenda for each meeting. I took the lead as much as I could to ‘manage’ specific aspects of our supervision.57

Another tactic was to ask for feedback on specific aspects of my writing. The feedback came very quickly, sometimes I felt this supervisor responded too

57 I question the practice of telling students they can manage their supervisors when the power disparity makes this possible only to a certain extent.
promptly to be seen to be a ‘good’ supervisor (as a result of his insecurity and also being under a lot of pressure). In these early stages, sometimes I found the comments were useful, while on other occasions they didn’t manage to sort out my confusions nor help me really explicitly. I wonder if it was because this supervisor couldn’t see things from my perspective as the student struggling to control the texts of my thesis. After I collected the first round of interview data I began writing summaries and some of my early chapters my supervisors thought were in report genre (I defaulted to a genre that I knew well). My supervisors showed only patience at this time. In a meeting summary I had recorded that one of the supervisors said that this was an indication that I wasn’t ready to write yet. In the end stages of my candidature one of my supervisors told me that both supervisors were exasperated by this situation. I was also frustrated too, and yet I didn’t ask them to provide any explicit teaching of what I should be doing. They just allowed me to work through my process. Also, I wanted to structure my chapters as standalone chapters so they were colossal in every way because they included theory, method, data analysis and discussion! My supervisors waited and watched as I gingerly began working with the interview data after erecting monstrous theoretical edifices in my chapters.

The more uncertain I was, the more I tried to be transparent, and the more trust between us was being tested as we were establishing the relationship. One supervisor had suggested taping meetings and I had followed up this offer. However, when I proposed that we tape meetings (because I found they were such a valuable source of ideas and I could replay the tape to capture the ideas I missed because I didn’t record them as doing so would distract my attention), this suggestion proved contentious at first. Both supervisors were nervous about putting them under such scrutiny in our meetings as I recorded in my journal:

One supervisor wanted to talk about the idea of taping of meetings as someone must have suggested that they could be misused. We cleared up what they’d be used for. The supervisor said I shouldn’t assume that the other supervisor will agree. Then he remembered or I reminded him that
he was the one who had suggested it as he thought it would be useful for me to see how the oral feedback played out in our meetings. There was a hint that I go about things in idiosyncratic ways - such as by writing summaries of each meeting. I justified why I did this as I think he felt slightly uncomfortable about the extent to which he is under scrutiny. It’s understandable really. The supervisor talked about trust as that is crucial for our relationship. The supervisor said it would be good to theorise this in terms of effective supervision. I said the fact he was taking the trouble to check this out with me was reassuring and demonstrated he was open and receptive to my input and ideas. (Meeting summary, 22/6/2000)

I was surprised that the supervisors would think I would misuse the tapes because I merely wanted to be able to be more present in the meeting. I was also unsure why one of the supervisors seemed to have forgotten and grown nervous about the taping which he had suggested. This came up again later when one supervisor mentioned that not all supervisors are comfortable about having meetings taped. Over ensuing months we ended up recording most of our meetings and I provided summaries of our meetings which my supervisors found useful (we would check points I’d misunderstood and so on). This ‘business-like’ approach (remember my former work for the PhD committee described in the Introductory chapter) enabled me to keep up on the tasks I needed to do as we designed the study and discussed a multitude of decisions that had to be made. I made a conscious effort to show them they could trust me in every way. We settled into a very good working routine and I felt very supported. They were very enthusiastic and often reiterated how much they enjoyed the process and working with me because they were learning about supervision.

My supervisors’ feedback during these stages consisted mainly of one supervisor sending an email summary and both lightly annotating the draft with comments. In these early stages when constant decisions are being made to define the scope of the research the drafts were very unstable. However, I began to feel insecure about their feedback as the drafts were taking a long time to take shape. Although they said the drafts were ready I didn’t think
they were. Perhaps they had a plan I didn’t know about for the end stages. When they didn’t urge me to keep going or help me revise the drafts I wondered about this. Were they trying to shield me from tough criticism? Because of my insecurity I started to wonder if their standards were rigorous enough and if I could rely on their judgements. At one point I asked a colleague to read a draft of a chapter to provide a second opinion. In her feedback she provided specific global written comments to help me identify how to improve the argument. But I couldn’t understand why my own supervisors didn’t do that. I wondered why they didn’t prompt me to keep working on the draft to resolve these problems. Here we see that I exercised power and autonomy by seeking an external opinion and that my supervisors’ position of having structural power made it hard for me to ask them for more substantive feedback, or reveal that I had sort outside consultation.

Because the length of my chapters was still a problem I was seeking some escape from this uncertainty. As noted above, I adopted the practice of asking for specific feedback early in my candidature and I asked one of my supervisors to help me prune them and he was unsure about what to do and didn’t in fact see it as a problem. While this was comforting for me (it saved me work!), I knew my readers would be overwhelmed and I didn’t want to exhaust my examiners. This supervisor consulted another colleague who suggested that I must do the pruning myself. I was torn about this. I felt on the one hand that it was useful that the supervisor had taken the trouble to consult with a more experienced colleague and also somewhat pathologised because my problem required outside intervention. In a similar vein, I felt excluded when my co-supervisors told me they had met to discuss strategies (when they were ensuring their advice was consistent) before our meetings and they told me they had done this. Why was I so nervous/mistrustful about this kind of supervisory deliberation or ‘collusion’? I think the power relations were leading to such suspicions, plus I was also a junior colleague, so I worried about what impression this would create. Sue Middleton’s (2001) research on the supervision of colleagues strikes a chord when she writes that the “experience of identifying simultaneously as colleague (peer) and as
student (apprentice) is conflictual” [because these dimensions create]
“inequalities, contradictions and tensions” (p. 10)

I was starting to think I just couldn’t do this difficult work and I’d really
misjudged my abilities and misunderstood what a PhD entailed. I felt really
compromised about this as I struggled to meet the ideal I had in mind as I
found it really hard to do this myself. So I just toughed it out. From my
reading and work with postgrads I knew that the feeling that no-one else can
help is paralysing and afflicts many postgraduates. It is partly fuelled by the
obligation to get things ‘right’ and to deliver a return (usually to the
supervisor or a significant other). It is also symptomatic of masculinist notions
of autonomy as discussed in Chapter 6, which are also driven by the
assumption that there is no need to teach writing at this level (and students
don’t ask for it). I felt this incident was marked by power. Why wouldn’t the
supervisor sit with me and teach me how to write?

At a low point after a meeting when I had spent six months on a chapter and
one of the supervisors had given positive feedback on the draft (the other
hadn’t had time), I wrote back to my supervisor and said how I had
contemplated giving up because I was discouraged and finding it difficult to
find a quiet writing space. The supervisor was wonderfully affirming:

I was surprised that you were feeling so bad about your candidature and
even to the extent of dropping this important work. You are absolutely
capable of completing a wonderful and exciting thesis. Your work is some
of the most enjoyable and relevant that I have seen as a supervisor! Yes, I
think quiet space is crucial for doing the kind of in depth work you are
doing. I hope that you will be able to find more of this time! … (Supervisor
email, 28/7/2004)

He also responded to a point we discussed about disembodying the student
author from the text in constructing the feedback (as I try to do as I write
these reflections):
When I talked about finding a subjective space for ‘disembodying’ the student from the text I did not mean a full or constant disembodiment. I see one of my roles as a supervisor is to move between objective and subjective positions. I believe it is important to get some distance from the text, both student and supervisor and at different times. I see it as something of a dance moving in and out of varying different subject positions. So ‘distance’ and ‘closeness’ to the thesis text seems an ongoing process of what happens in the production of this kind of work. Your timeline seems appropriate, especially since you have jumped this difficult hurdle in your work. I find that you are really ‘on track’ and that future writing will be much less psychically and intellectually demanding. (Supervisor email, 28/7/2004)

Despite a lot of encouragement and optimism about what the thesis would produce, in these early/middle stages I was struggling to define the thesis and know how to work with the interview data. I remember I was so nervous about editing the quotes in case I misrepresented one of the interviewees. It took me a long time to feel confident about using the data. One supervisor had told me from the outset that he didn’t ever look at student’s raw interview data. In hindsight it would have been beneficial to sit with some excerpts and try and work with the analytical categories.

Over time, I grew increasingly insecure about working with these supervisors. Were my difficulties with writing and settling the text linked to their supervision, or my stage of candidature, or the nature of my thesis, or due to my inabilities? They were always very encouraging, but were they treating my work seriously? Did they have a competent grasp of the theoretical knowledge? Without having supervisors with topic expertise, was my thesis ever going to take shape? Interestingly, for Foucault (1994c) ‘suspicion’ is a manifestation of resistance to pastoral power. In this instance, I was questioning the effects of power in terms of what counts as knowledge and competence through my concerns about the calibre of my supervisors’ feedback and topic expertise.
These doubts and difficulties stemming from my frustration about my writing triggered other concerns. I started to be anxious about the supervisors’ inexperience in supervising students to completion and whether our different disciplinary fields were compatible. I thought that these supervisors were at a loss about how to help me, but nobody broached the issue. Also, these were my first experiences of feedback from supervisors (never having done honours), so how did other supervisors provide feedback?

With two new supervisors appointed due to my supervisors’ changed circumstances I experienced quite different styles of supervision. My other supervisors reacted differently to being ‘objects of analysis’ too. They were self-conscious in quite different ways. They didn’t seem to me to be at all nervous. We had known each other for some time and there were high levels of trust. They supported the idea I had proposed to reproduce their marginal and intralinear feedback on the penultimate draft in the final version of the thesis, whereas my other supervisors discouraged the idea and suggested deferring it for post-doc work. I wanted my thesis to be somewhat unique by this integrated display of supervisory input to show the ‘behind the scenes’ building blocks - the scaffolding and construction - of a thesis text. But then I faced an important decision because I didn’t want to make them anxious about this, and I wanted to capture an ‘authentic’ moment of feedback not a contrived one, but I certainly did not want to ‘trick’ my supervisors. So at one point I corresponded with one supervisor about how best to go about this in an ethical way.

The idea seemed to just peter out (perhaps the idea of risking my own vulnerability and exposing my supervisors was a factor), but I still wonder what impact it would have had on the reader. It seemed really important for me to do this and especially with my agenda to challenge the burden of

58 I recommended all my three supervisors for Supervisor Excellence Awards. One was ineligible and one other supervisor only supervised me for a short period of time.

59 I often consulted one of my supervisors for advice on how to work constructively with my other supervisors. This supervisor was under the impression that her role entailed the least responsibility in my supervision, yet it was important to have someone removed from the immediate context.
autonomy that a lot of students carry as they write their thesis texts. Naturally I was nervous about making a spectacle of myself by revealing the extent of the overwriting of my texts, but I also thought this public expression might support arguments made in my thesis about *interdependence* and power relations. It might also help other students, who like me were unpractised at thesis writing, to let them see how a supervisor disciplined a text, in this case, my text. Of course, because this example would become a fixture in my thesis I would need to qualify that different supervisors went about the process of textual revision and feedback differently.

While the feedback these supervisors offered was still concerned with disciplining the text, the supervisors were watching themselves and conscious of trying to see through my eyes. They were concerned about how I might feel as the writer/author/researcher and also explicit about their responses to the text. This had a monumental impact on my self-confidence and my work started to settle down and take shape. I think I needed ‘masters/mistresses’ and responded well to their combining - à la Freire - of agitation, warmth and disciplining (1996). I felt that because these supervisors had topic expertise and were well versed in the theories I was drawing on that my work was being strengthened. For example, when they suggested I’d misunderstood a theoretical point, I gained confidence in them. Agitation worked well coupled with encouragement because it pushed me to check my assumptions and helped me clarify my writing. This acting on the actions of each other as the texts were transacted sped things up. Uncertainties I had about the writing were settling down. These supervisors were self-conscious not because their feedback was an object of analysis, but because they were considerate of the power relations between us and their feedback was constantly checking this.

Some of my supervisors’ feedback addressed process issues, some addressed structure, some addressed style, and some pure mechanics. Sometimes they were like undertaker bees whose specific role in the hive was to take out the dead and dying that were lying around in my sentences. Sometimes they glossed and preened, scrubbed and rubbed, and then they shined with a bit of spit’n polish. In fact, I was in awe of how all my supervisors could read such
raw drafts and still be so positive and find something worthwhile in them and also see a way forward. They were such a mess and I was struggling to control the length, work with the rich interview data and the theoretical material, so they were a very heavy/taxing read for my supervisors.

I don’t think some of my other supervisors really knew how to help and perhaps I found it hard to articulate how I needed their help. I just kept going the way I knew how. When I showed one supervisor the extent of the comments on the draft from one other supervisor and tactfully hinted that I found this feedback really helpful, the supervisor said: “I don’t work that way”. I came to accept this difference and worked with both supervisors in different ways.

Of course when I found that my other supervisors could get me out of the trough I’d been languishing in for some time, and which they had to work very hard to do, I was so grateful to them. They helped instigate my move into a new phase in my research/writing. With these different notions of autonomy and how to supervise research/writing I have experienced in my own supervision I have learned that what one supervisor considers is heavy ‘tampering’ and a loss to a student’s ‘full’ autonomy is considered helpful feedback and a way of enabling the student’s ‘limited’ autonomy for another supervisor. The desire to ‘get things right’ need not be daunting, especially if the supervisor offers criticism that is alert to power relations. As one supervisor commented: “that ‘getting it right’ IS tough and is rarely done single handedly and never without blood, sweat and tears”. I am still ambivalent about this former notion of autonomy (for it didn’t help me get me where I wanted to be) and I have argued in this thesis that because doctoral research is supervised research it is always a ‘qualified’ autonomy. One other issue that may unsettle the student is when the supervisor subscribes to a view of ‘full’ autonomy and they withhold their critique because they want to shield students who they know can’t perform at this level.
Self as object of analysis

I also learned that my capacity to exercise autonomous judgement was limited. Therefore another surprise was that because a lot of the time I knew I didn’t have control of the writing - my inexperience in working across a large text and with the difficult theoretical material, and working with such rich interview data, the stage I was at in the process - I was very dependent on my supervisors. I felt uneasy sending texts off in this raw state, but often it was sheer pragmatism (and then exhaustion) that were deciding factors. There were differences again in the ways my different supervisors responded to these emergent texts and managed the process of giving feedback and this included the nature and extent of assistance provided. When the texts came back heavily annotated I was both appreciative (for their in-depth guidance!) and despondent (I felt frustrated/distraught that I couldn’t do this by myself which I truly expected I should be able to do).

There were times when I had to bolster myself before replying to these comments. Sometimes it took a day to recover. My supervisors acknowledged how I bounced back from these episodes. For me, there was no point being defensive. Sure I felt disappointed and dejected at first, but then when I saw the difference to my drafts I knew that I just had to get over it. I wrote to them in response to their encouragements: “I am so limited and close to the work, that I find it really helpful to have your insights …”. In my darker moments I did question my intellectual abilities, but persisted with the thought that I was at least getting some things right because I was never told to go and start all over again. What sustained me was my supervisors’ constant engagement and interest in the work and the ways they set about meeting their obligations and just got down to it with utmost professionalism!

Sometimes/often I was on my own and worked for months at a time when there were long stretches of hard slog. I was “left to my own devices to

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60 Here I am quite exposed so I’d be grateful if you would please flag any spots and suggest any ways I might need to protect myself or even prompt me to see/cast things differently.

61 But I didn’t feel shame as Trout suggest I ought. I was more forgiving of myself than this.

62 I kept expressing my gratitude to them which probably drove them mad!
struggle through the writing process virtually alone” (Gay, 2004: 279) and this was what I thought I had to do. I took a lot freedom and I was given it. I was given a lot freedom and I took it. There is solitude and aloneness in being self-reliant and this notion of autonomy makes me nervous and I could only go so far with it. I took quite a few wrong turns along the way and one chapter was excluded but it served an important function as it was like a rehearsal for subsequent ones. Interestingly, one supervisor commented that if she had been involved in the early stages of my candidature she would have narrowed the focus/scope of the thesis a lot more and this would have meant that thesis would not have been as rich.

It is always difficult to know at what point to let go of a piece of writing and students and supervisors have vastly different preferences in this regard. I found it hard to know when to push through and persevere a bit longer myself or whether to just let it go in an imperfect state. I was always uncertain about what my supervisors would say on every draft I sent off. I was so dependent on them to judge the quality of what I was doing because I lost all sense of it. In the end stages, when I knew my authorial contribution needed to come to the fore I still equivocated and I still looked to them for validation. I was so used to their feedback and I also valued their insights because I knew I had many blindspots. This was not at all what I imagined it would be like as I thought that by this stage a PhD student should be ‘fully’ autonomous.

In writing the chapters and reflecting on my own process I often drew parallels to the experiences of my study participants. These students sometimes got frustrated with the feedback and they found it hard to let go of their early/rough drafts. I don’t think it was a fear of shame but a feeling of I can’t get it right. When I was writing Chapter 4 I wondered about how Jennifer Gore’s categories played out in my own supervision. I was also certainly not conscious of being normalised but my supervisors tried to reassure me and make me feel good again. One supervisor reiterated that the

63 I wrote the first data chapter after maternity leave in which I read supervision through the metaphors of the understudy/director using performance as a theme (Knowles, 2004). I may well pick this up again in future writing.
feedback she gave was like the treatment she gave her own texts. This felt affirming, but it was also frustrating because I couldn’t seem to edit my own work to the degree/extent that was required. To keep producing the chapters was so tiring. I could critique other people’s work and had spent years working with graduate students’ drafts as a student learning adviser. Working with fresh ideas and ill-formed thoughts was familiar to me, but I found it difficult to give my own work this kind of treatment. I never had the time to get distance from the writing and I was so invested in the drafts. I couldn’t see the whole thesis and my chapters were part of that whole that was not yet a whole (just an abyssal hole!).

I think I normalised myself - not in terms of my rate of progress - but I often wondered how much feedback other students were given and if I was ‘abnormal’ in some way. My sense of deviancy was a by-product of the norms that I had internalised from institutional practices of differentiation which constitute normal and deviant writing practices. These I appreciate are not intellectual but political. The distinction I’m making signals the importance of individual differences and our capacity to take criticism. My “Women Writing Away” (WA) group counteracted these labels and alleviated any stigma because we wrote communally and within my community I was not an isolated individual. I saw others who also worked diligently on their texts to be clear about what they wanted to say. Most were afflicted by the long and difficult nature of the process. It seemed that everyone faced some issue that affected their supervisory relations and candidature. We learned from each other.

Another surprise was that even though my supervisors offered the most kind, patient and reassuring feedback the self-doubt persisted alongside their constant reassurances that the thesis would be good. While it was never acute and despite having absolute trust in my supervisors’ judgements, each time I submitted work one enduring fear was that I would be told (very gently) that I was a fraud. The interim waiting period was interminable (but always quick on their part) and after a short recovery period, I would go back and reread my texts and still want to work on them. Rationally, I knew that it is widely acknowledged that the writing of the thesis is a demanding and painstaking
task and I also know that many students are haunted by the prospect of failure. This fear is attributed to candidature being a “mad process in its assignment of a structural role to insecurity” (Frow, 1988: 319). Irrationally, I expected the phone to ring and even though I’d got to a certain point with the thesis, I would be told that I was undeserving of this opportunity and I should give up, or that my supervisors would relinquish their supervision.

I think I shared this nagging self-doubt with many of the study participants who said that in the third/end stages interview that the most surprising aspect of their candidature was finding out they could do it. There is research that confirms this widespread sense of fraudulence or imposter syndrome (Brems, Baldwin, Davis, & Namyniuk, 1994) in students whose liminal status engenders such angst (particularly for women) (Salmon, 1992). However, what this research doesn’t address is how the threat that is implied by being discovered as lacking may make us behave as the ‘good’ student as a way of coping. I kept my supervisors informed about delays and gave regular updates on progress (which probably drove them mad too!). I kept scrupulous records on my computer to be sure I was putting in the effort. Sometimes I was interrupted every few minutes (with a question or request or a toy needing repairs or attention) and I recorded the interruption, so by the end of the evening I had a daily tally of dedicated work time. I thought the discipline would stand me in good stead if I was ever questioned about my commitment. While I became accustomed to this fragmented way of working, some days were absolutely intolerable. I just persevered determined not to rely on full-time day-care and outsourcing or becoming an obsessive hermit. My feminist self also kept me going because she knew that women experienced candidature differently and doctoral research students were supposed to be privileged white males. I am hardly able to grasp what it is that allowed me to sustain the effort as sometimes I questioned my integrity because I didn’t like what I had to become to make progress (a block to other’s needs, unsympathetic to their wants, dismissive of their illnesses) to keep the writing going.64

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64 Sometimes I could identify with the dysfunctional thesis writer Barbara Marchant in Matthew Karpin’s novella (who ends up crossing out her entire thesis) and who tells one of her
The disciplining of the text was hard but my desire to get things ‘right’ fuelled this. My trust in the relationships and my supervisors’ feedback were integral to my getting through this. I think they must have been exhausted by this. I wondered if they were holding back in/on their feedback because of its impact on my sensibilities and to show consideration of me. I knew that sometimes when my supervisors asked me to look at my process (and to change it), because it was convoluted and this made the writing process arduous for me, and hard on the reader, that this caused would have caused them some discomfort. While I knew I needed to change and I had tried to be more conscious of planning and working from outlines for some chapters and keeping to word targets, I was still drowning in a sea of possibilities, writing and thinking outside my theoretical and methodological comfort zones. So the chapters were long and I just took a long time!65

Thankfully, the time issue was not something my supervisors seemed to worry about or at least they did not convey any unease to me about. In fact, they seemed to do their utmost to protect me from this. This included buffering the effects of the pressure and stigmatisation I felt from the administrative staff. In my eighth year since enrolling (4 year 7 months 11 days full-time equivalent), I was asked to attend “a frank interview”66 as I was designated “a long-term enrolled higher-degree student”. I reacted badly to what felt to me like infantilising treatment in being designated as needing pastoral guidance (offered by the Dean of Graduate Studies). The goal of producing a good thesis was paramount and I knew my supervisors shared this goal. Only once in a supervisory meeting was I reminded of the time issues as one of my supervisors asked me when I would finish my thesis. Again, I reacted badly because my supervisors had never suggested there was a problem with my

irate study participants that: “I don’t live in the same world as you, and anything that happens outside my four walls, in fact anything that happens off the page, is of no consequence to me,” (Karpin, 2004: 46).

65 Again, I fear I’ve become like the fictional Barbara who in “The thesis” (on the dust jacket) is described as follows: “A young woman begins to write her doctoral thesis at the age of 21. Twenty years later, she has nearly finished— but in the intervening years her struggles have taken on gargantuan proportions and she has learnt many of life’s hardest—and funniest—lessons.”

66 Sometimes these interviews backfired. A doctoral student told me that she stopped work for six months after her interview because she was so angry about being infantilised this way.
progress and this felt like a betrayal of trust because I was always fighting with time. I was fanatical about time. So this question was loaded with personal and political meaning for me!

Despite being dependent on my supervisors for their feedback and input, in many senses I was autonomous (within the constraints previously mentioned). It was my creative impulses that shaped the design of the thesis and culminated in the current structure of the thesis. I never felt that my supervisors (despite their valuable input) were controlling the spheres of thought or arguments that I was making. My supervisors were instrumental and indispensable in helping me clarify and express my ideas. Perhaps my supervisors had better strategies for making me feel in control and encouraging this sense of being in control. But I was also aware of being dependent in ways that I could be within the institutionalised power relationship. We were working interdependently and this is important to acknowledge, because if we translate the power hierarchy too literally we can lose a sense of the brief moments when there is mutual sharing, improvisation and exchange.

My supervisors’ feedback taught me some other important lessons about the craft of writing, and this has reinforced my view that supervisors are teachers of writing, yet this side of their work is discounted because some supervisors themselves are uncomfortable about it as they see themselves as researchers first. This reluctance/inability to share craft knowledge brings me to what I think are some of the unspoken elements of supervision because I suspect that a lot of the knotty feedback problems in supervision that entangle the loop are because of students’ difficulties with writing and supervisor’s in teaching about it. This uncertainty can be productive and it can also paralyse the student and their work if they are left to flounder as I did at times.

I think what distinguished my end stages of candidature were a different set of relations to my supervisors and they had a different relation to my texts. Feedback relations are different I believe when the writing relation is privileged and the supervisor gives feedback as a writer rather than
conceiving their relation to the student and text is purely a research relationship. I now turn to consider how this kind of authorship that is productive of different student-supervisor relations played out in my supervision as I try to flesh out a bit more what I think characterises this feedback relation.

Pastoral power relations in my supervision - ensuring, sustaining, improving

My supervisors in their positions as ‘pastors’ provided constant assurances that they would lead me to safe ground and provide salvation, meaning “health, well-being ... security, protection against accidents” (Foucault, 1994b: 334). Techniques of individualisation were dominant in our supervision - their feedback was about me, my writing, my process, my thesis, my candidature. They were able to fulfil this promise of salvation because of my strong investment in the relationship, my ongoing professional work, the nature of my field of enquiry, and my desire to learn to write well, plus my willingness to “take on pedagogical norms as personal desires” (Hunter, 1996a: 7). But I never felt that these norms were being imposed perniciously. As writer/researcher supervisors they were painfully aware of their power and the ways it was exercised and how it could hinder the possibility for clear communication at the point of delivery and reception of the feedback. They were open about their investments in their supervision, the limits of transparency and the workings of mystery.

So how did we negotiate the power relations? This was done consciously and unconsciously. There were no major breakdowns so the power issues kept a low profile in my supervision. I think I had the best of both worlds - I was working with supervisors who were attuned to the politics of power in supervision. I was always treated in a collegial manner and their equalising strategies were coupled with their awareness of the power relation. This meant that we could open up dialogues about power relations - at a theoretical and practical level - because my supervisors were conscious of the effects of their power they knew that I would find it difficult to challenge

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67 One Supervisor wrote a “Coda” (Grant, 2006) in which she reflected on what she gained from being the supervisor.
their feedback, so they were mindful of the effects of their feedback on me and used different strategies such as offering feedback as suggestions, providing a rationale for changes, and so on.

I was barely aware of the power asymmetry and I had chosen these supervisors because I knew I needed their theoretical and topic expertise to help me write my thesis. My supervisors did not play down their authority in terms of their topic expertise. I gave credence to them because I wanted to get the thesis written and they had done the work of reading and thinking and writing that I hadn’t. The structural inequality that incited me to get the work done was not due to the supervisors’ status as university employees or as figures of authority, but out of respect for my supervisors as people and scholars. This is what gave them authority and lent them expertise. I felt that their practices and working relationship with me were as ‘open’ as they could be within the institutional constraints. Also because my field of enquiry promoted the reflective work since we were doing the thinking on and about power relations and how it is exercised in supervision.

I noted above how I resorted to transparency as a means of dealing with the ambiguities. I tried to invite the kind of feedback I needed and give my supervisors feedback on what worked. I often gave my supervisors feedback on their feedback as a way of thanking them and also letting them know how beneficial it was. I was of course reluctant to say what didn’t work and just let it pass. I ignored feedback when it wasn’t helpful, but this rarely happened. Sometimes/often there were mismatches between what my supervisors intended and what I provided. They also tried to be transparent, yet as writer/researcher supervisors they recognised that their feedback was open to interpretation and they would accept responsibility for the possibility that they may have confused things or me.

The feedback I received from these supervisors was extensive. In addition to notes written in emails and responses to my specific questions, their comments on the draft were also more comprehensive. The tone was careful and self-reflective, it turned back on itself. (“Sally, my preference is for
cleaned-up text ... but that is pretty personal I realise.”); (“influence? (control I don’t think so ...) I’m sure T and I give you more than you ask for!! 😊”) It taught me how to improve the writing. (“Set up by linking to autonomy theme”, “2 ideas mixed up here”). It made me feel appreciated for my efforts. (“I really like this metaphor”) ( “✓✓ v. good. This is a lovely section”). (“Thanks for that Sally - will do and thanks for all that hard, true, intellectual work you put into things -- oh do I appreciate it.”) What was most striking were the individualised comments and the writerly support speaking to me and hailing me directly, even when omissions were suggested the supervisor gave a rationale for this. (“Sally - I think this interrupts the flow (doesn’t go with what has just been said) and has been made clear - implicitly & explicitly - in your choice of citations. Cut?”); (“small suggestions - over to you!”). I was curious about this form of individualisation and interested in this practice of naming me in the comments written on the draft. The supervisors were able to shift to a position which considered and was considerate of the effects their comments might be having on me as the writer/author. (Sally - are you O.K. to cut this bit and just end up with the suggested phrase about “limits”? I think it works better.”) They asked me to make decisions, but they didn’t use an ‘under offering’ discourse as discussed in Chapter 7, they invited me to share making these decisions.

I know that one supervisor disclosed in a “Coda” (Grant, 2006) for a conference presentation we did that her apprehension about giving me feedback stemmed from her ambivalence about the possibilities of ‘negotiating’ transparently. She also reflected on her practice of working with the text and the person as she crafted her feedback:

Mercifully, over time, I have come to see that my feedback and the other supervisor’s is usually not so different but that we have different ways of expressing ourselves. The other supervisor is very attentive to encouraging and appreciating Sally - whereas I know I do in my heart, but I often don’t on paper. Instead I become fixated on the needs of the thesis (my needs too as an academic critic?). In practice I have found that if I write the email to address those needs first, then go back to think about the person
of Sally, I am more likely to give feedback that addresses/cares for both.  
(This is one of the possibilities of written feedback as the mode of supervision.) (p. 3)

During the drafting process we also discussed differences in how we used terminology. I was using the word ‘exchanges of feedback’ rather loosely. I was initially using it in a restricted sense to refer to the physical exchange the to’ing and fro’ing of drafts. But I also thought it was possible for there to be moments of mutual exchange as knowledge is being produced. In the “Coda” paper the supervisor wrote about her concerns regarding the possibility of ‘exchange’. This supervisor reflected on how she first disagreed with my usage of ‘exchange’:

I reliably respond that I don’t think we can think of the feedback process in that way. I see it as a process whereby different things are exchanged: Sally sends me her drafts and I send her back my critical response to them. True, the draft goes between us but not the critique. (p. 5)

Her viewpoint shifts to consider how she then revised her point of view about the possible meanings and this ‘exchange’ between us did in fact allow her to develop insights about her own thinking. I did too and I began to use the word ‘transaction’ to mark this distinction.

The supervisor noted in the “Coda” (Grant, 2006) that she was given the last word and I am unaware of the complex ways this same effect may have played out as feedback was being given on the drafts. But as I noted in Chapter 6 the student is the one who enacts the changes in the draft and I was the one who decided when to stop the process of feedback. While I may have the last word here in this Epilogue, power effects are also played out mysteriously. These other dimensions which we can’t know are attributed to the slippery nature of power relations - what is revealed and thereby inadvertently concealed by this unmasking (Stanley, 2004: 205).
One of my obligations or so I thought was to think independently. When I first received corrections - suggested rewordings to my texts I reworded them because I worried about my supervisor's influence and I wanted to be self-contained. However, by the end stages I became more pragmatic and accepted my supervisors’ rephrasings as ‘gifts’ - and these offerings were imported fully into my texts. Changing my views about the nature of autonomy was freeing. I understood that my pseudo autonomy was an effect of power.

I also noted above how reliant I was on my supervisors for direction and correction and how surprised I was about the degree to which I relied on them for emotional support and feedback. Our relations were infused with psychological elements. Friendly support flavoured all our interactions. In the context of a protective and adult relationship, this made it easier for me to give up the goal of trying to get ‘everything’ right. Once I knew my drafts were going to be treated seriously (given their full attention and that I would be forgiven, I felt less grief-stricken about their rawness) and I would send them off when I felt that I got them to a stage that was good enough. I always kept timelines in view - sometimes these were stipulated by me, sometimes they were because of the supervisors’ commitments. Often things never quite went according to plan.

How did mystery play out in our supervision in terms of power? It played out productively in the ways it inspired my creativity and drove me to get the thesis written and provided a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction (once my rambunctious drafts settled down!). When there were misunderstandings I was cautious about how I reacted. I think it also played out in my inexplicable reactions - of hurt, disappointment, alienation, crisis in confidence and disempowerment; and my suppositions about my supervisors - suspicion, insecurity, anxiety of influence, anger, and frustration.
Closing (parting words and thoughts) and farewelling (leave-taking from the page)\textsuperscript{68}

When I first began this research I set out to explore the reported anecdotal dissatisfaction with feedback on the part of both students and supervisors. Over time I have lost the desire to reform recalcitrant supervisors and to empower passive students (well maybe I’m still interested in the latter).\textsuperscript{69} Losing this desire was mainly the result of experiencing supervision firsthand and starting to appreciate its complexities and learning to tolerate its ambiguities. Here I’m referring to some of the issues that I have had to work through with my supervisors regarding their feedback and my assumptions about it, as outlined above in this personal and one-sided account that tries to get some distance and ends up getting up very close and textual (through my interpretations of my five supervisors’ actions/intentions)!

In the long time of my thesis (over a ten year period)\textsuperscript{70} I have come to appreciate the importance of supervisory feedback as a disciplinary device and also as a means for teaching/learning about the ‘craft’ of writing. This distinction is an important one because I think most supervisors see themselves as researchers, rather than as writer/researchers and these perceptions influence their feedback practice. As a researcher the supervisor may discipline students’ texts in the sense of ensuring they conform to disciplinary standards and conventions, whereas a supervisor who is writer/researcher goes about this task differently and does more than this. I think they may have a completely different relationship to the student’s text and therefore to the student as author.

\textsuperscript{68} All three current supervisors have read this Epilogue.
\textsuperscript{69} During our writing retreats I suggested that there is a need for postgraduate students to write a text for significant others who are also deeply affected by the process. This writing would help them understand what different students go through and why even simple tasks are difficult to perform, why we are disconnected from others because we are so overwhelmed by the thesis and how it saps our energies for other things, and to map the kind of coping strategies that students devise.
\textsuperscript{70} My first two supervisors were recommended by the School and were not at all known by me. Both these supervisors changed universities. The third supervisor was recommended as a replacement while the second supervisor went on study leave (and I liked and knew this person a little). When the third supervisor went on study leave I asked the fourth and fifth supervisors to be involved. They were both chosen by me for they were well known as writers and researchers, for their topic expertise, for their supervision practice and because I knew and I liked them.
I think I had a good candidature. It went “as well as they ever go” for a doctoral student, as a friend put it. I was never scarred or beaten with words (Lee & Williams, 1999) (my biggest fear!) and I was never shamed (as Trout advocates), yet I know plenty of students who have been. I’ve had quite the opposite - agitation, warmth, discipline. I found the writing incredibly hard and so it was an unsteady process for me - I had to develop self-supporting strategies (my women’s writing retreats, my efforts to be transparent and work with mystery, my ‘open’ dialogues with supervisors about the process, consulting colleagues for second opinions, self-discipline, risk-taking, wrong turns, perseverance, and so on). I relied heavily on my supervisors and friends for emotional support, yet the experience is profoundly alienating and hard to share with others. It took quite a lot of careful and considered strategising on my part and sometimes called on all my skills to manage and deal with the mixed/vexed/swinging feelings. There never seemed to be any certainties and a changing psychological state was the norm.

Feelings/sensations of huge relief inundate my sense of self - to think that at the end of my candidature I have maintained robust relations with all my supervisors and friends and family who have also been involved in this epic thesis journey. I tried hard to promote good relations as did my supervisors. I can’t speak highly enough of them for their goodness. I can’t imagine what it must be like for the students and supervisors who are unable to maintain harmonious relations. While being ‘close’ to most of my supervisors and having formed friendships and established professional relations with them I kept a respectful distance from them. I compartmentalised and rarely divulged my personal difficulties (apart from health-related problems) to protect them from my messy processes. I remember my supervisor pointing out to me that supervisors’ guardedness with their emotions compounds the power asymmetry. This is one disparity that I did not want to magnify when they, as supervisors, were already full up with my thesis. Retaining my other

71 One supervisor reminds me that it’s normal to feel gratitude in the end stages! But the trauma stories in supervision (while not the only ones!) are abundant.
identities whilst doing this thesis was vital for extricating me from the cloistered and monastic existence I led.

Over the time of my thesis I did a Diploma in Counselling to learn strategies for dealing with more messy human interrelations with family and in my workplace. I tutored an Equity student and ran a class to help some of the women in my Counselling course with their essay writing tasks assigned for the course. I also engaged in voluntary work: I did projects for Oxfam CAA and lobbied for asylum seeker rights and improving Indigenous health. I organised the publicity for an international adult literacy conference; I convened a national adult literacy conference; I instigated a campaign to improve wages and conditions of childcare workers (once I started being a user of such facilities); I organised a campaign in my local area as part of a national campaign to save old growth forests in WA and discontinue the use of woodchips for making paper (being such a heavy user of paper!); and I participated in the establishment of a bilingual playgroup. I helped my brother and sister-in-law develop primary school teaching materials and online resources for their wildlife incursion business with insects, spiders and scorpions. Also, over the last four years I organised 16 “Women writing away” retreats for WA women. I felt it was important to write my thesis and retain my sense of self as a professional and member of a community. I also needed community to sustain my sense of self and to offset the isolation that is a feature of writing that I felt.

Such experiences have shown me how central emotions are to knowledge-production processes. Much of the pain, joy, pleasure, uncertainty remains vivid/close and will be carried in my body. I’ll never forget the time battles I fought. Perhaps some of my memories of the time of my thesis will fade and be relegated and I may well forget the negatives. The mystery and ineffability of supervisory relations suggest to me the potency of the intensely intersubjective nature of this process; they also suggest that supervision is a sludgy terrain. This mixed bag of feelings (sometimes antagonism towards my supervisors, sometimes gratitude, sometimes ambivalence, mostly reverence) gets to the complexity of these psychodynamic processes, and the very human
experiences we have, and the difficult things we ask of each other. We expect supervisors and students to get everything ‘right’ when I have learnt that forgiveness of each other and acceptance of imperfection have been important parts of my process “to prove myself at the highest level” (Leonard et al., 2005). So now you know a bit (but never the whole story) about the process of how this text was written, supervised and my scholarly formation was forged. I am uncomfortable with endings and never seem to get them ‘right’, so I look for ways to help me face what I am losing and gaining (or what is still to be found) and ponder my ambivalence about all this.72

72 During our autumn writing retreat where I wrote this Epilogue I proposed a ritual (a meditative walk through the mysterious winding paths of the Chartrean labyrinth that is a metaphor for our journeys - being a coy lot they refused to dance naked by the full moon!) to send off my thesis and to convey good thoughts to the “repeat attender” women as they write their theses - some are nearly there, some are simmering along, others have theses that need reawakening as they are hibernating. All of them are juggling different and difficult responsibilities. To conclude the ceremony I wish them all well and we all perform a spontaneous honky nut touching and throwing ritual to ensure they have safe passage.
Appendices

Appendix 1  Social Sciences, Humanities, Education (SSHE) Postgraduate Bulletin email to attract study participants
Appendix 2  Letter to invited supervisors
Appendix 3  Letter to students nominated by supervisors
Appendix 4A  Student Feedback practices questionnaire (pre-meeting Interview 2)
Appendix 4B  Supervisor Feedback practices questionnaire (pre-meeting Interview 2)
Appendix 5A  Student Interview 1 questions (middle stages)
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Appendix 6A  Student Interview 2 questions (middle/end stages post-meeting 2)
Appendix 6B  Supervisor Interview 2 questions (middle/end stages post-meeting I/V 2)
Appendix 7A  Student Interview 3 questions (end stages)
Appendix 7B  Supervisor Interview 3 questions (end stages)
Hi! I am a PhD student, and formerly a staff member who worked in Student Learning (TLC), and I am conducting a study of feedback on writing entitled “Feedback on writing in postgraduate supervision: a study of the social relationships of textual practice in an Australian University”. Dr Wayne Martino of the Australian Institute of Education is my supervisor and Dr James Bell is my associate supervisor.

In my work in Student Learning I was alerted to some of the issues around feedback for postgraduate students and supervisors. It is surprising that such an important and routine exchange of information has received so little consideration. Since little research has been done in the area of postgraduate education, little is known about the responding behaviours of supervisors, their comments about students’ work in progress, and about student’ reactions to these comments.

The purpose of my study is to explore how students and supervisors negotiate feedback through these textual exchanges in the production of a thesis. I plan to investigate students’ preferences for receiving feedback in order to discover strategies for effective practice which impact positively on the quality and effectiveness of supervision. This research also has valuable and important implications for understanding how feedback is shaped by culturally-bound attitudes and for addressing these in supervisory relationships. It will lead to improved feedback through the use of productive approaches as most supervisors, who in considering what they do in teaching writing, want to believe that their feedback plays a useful role.

It is an investigation of issues of literacy and social power with specific attention to gender. The project will lead to the development of effective feedback strategies due to a better understanding of the social and interpersonal dynamics of gender, power and control and how such relations are produced and negotiated in postgraduate supervisory relationships.

You can help by participating with your supervisor. What this would entail for you is outlined below:

- completing a short pre-interview questionnaire
• attending three interviews of no more than one hour each time over
  one year at six monthly intervals in August 2000, February 2001,
  August 2001
• completing three self-assessment forms before each interview
• handing in a sample of feedback at the second interview
• possibility of one follow-up interview

All information is completely confidential and no data or report will be
produced which allows individuals to be identified. I estimate that the time
involvement over one year would be approximately six hours.

The benefits of being involved in this research are that it will be practical and
inform your work with students for those of you are tutoring. Also, because it
will be self-reflective for the participants it is likely that you will get more
out of the feedback you will be given.

I’d be most grateful if you would reply to this email indicating your
willingness to participate by [insert date]. I will also need to know your
supervisor’s name and postal address so I can invite him/her formally. Upon
receipt of a positive response, I will then send a detailed outline of what your
involvement entails and a consent form for you to sign, and notify you of the
time schedule for interviews.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like more details of the
study design and purpose.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this and for your help (in
anticipation of a positive response)!

Sally Knowles
Australian Institute of Education
Murdoch University
☎ 9 382 2361
email: sknowles@murdoch.edu.au
Appendix 2

16th October 2000

Dear <<insert name>>,

Study of postgraduate feedback on writing - invitation to participate

I am a PhD student, and formerly a staff member who worked Student Learning (TLC), and I am conducting a study of feedback on writing entitled “Feedback on writing in postgraduate supervision: a study of the social relationships of textual practice in an Australian University”. Dr Wayne Martino of the Australian Institute of Education is my supervisor and Dr James Bell is my associate supervisor.

Your postgraduate student <<insert name>> has indicated his/her willingness to participate in this study and I am writing to ask if you too would like to be involved. The study has been designed to capture perspectives from both supervisors and students so I hope that you will agree to participate along with <<insert student’s name>>.

In my work in Student Learning I was alerted to some of the issues around feedback for postgraduates and supervisors. It is surprising that such an important and routine exchange of information has received so little consideration. Since little research has been done in the area of postgraduate education, little is known about the responding behaviours of supervisors, their comments about students’ work in progress, and about students’ reactions to these comments.

The purpose of my study is to explore how students and supervisors negotiate feedback through these textual exchanges in the production of a thesis. I plan to investigate students’ preferences for receiving feedback in order to discover strategies for effective practice which impact positively on the quality and effectiveness of supervision. This research also has valuable and important implications for understanding how feedback is shaped by culturally-bound attitudes and for addressing these in supervisory relationships. It will lead to improved feedback through the use of productive approaches as most supervisors, who in considering what they do in teaching writing, want to believe that their feedback plays a useful role.

It is an investigation of issues of literacy and social power with specific attention to gender. The project will lead to the development of effective feedback strategies due to a better understanding of the social and interpersonal dynamics of gender, power and control and how such relations are produced and negotiated in postgraduate supervisory relationships.
You can help by participating with your student. What this would entail for you is outlined below:

- completing a short pre-interview questionnaire
- attending 3 interviews of no more than one hour each time over one year in August 2000, February 2001, August 2001
- completing 3 self-assessment forms before the interview
- agreeing that your student can hand in 3 samples of feedback at the interview
- possibility of 1 follow-up interview

All information is completely confidential and no data or report will be produced which allows individuals to be identified. I estimate that the time involvement over one year would be approximately six hours.

The benefits of being involved in this research are that it will be practical and inform your work with students, as well as being self-reflective for you.

I’d be most grateful if you would return the slip below to me indicating your willingness to participate by [insert date]. I will then send a detailed outline of what your involvement entails and a consent form for you to sign, and notify you of the time schedule for interviews.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like more details of the study design and purpose.

Thank you so much for your help!

Sally Knowles
Australian Institute of Education
Murdoch University
☎ 9 382 2361
e-mail: sknowles@murdoch.edu.au
Consent Form

☐.......................................................................................................................☐

I am interested in participating in the research study entitled “Feedback on writing in postgraduate supervision: a study of the social relationships of textual practice in an Australian University” with my postgraduate student ..................................................... [insert name].

Supervisor’s name
........................................................................................................................................

Division/School of study
........................................................................................................................................

Ph: ☎ .........................; ................................
Email: .........................................................................................

Please return this slip to the address above [insert date]. Thank you for your help.
Appendix 3

[<<insert address>>]

[<<insert date>>]

Dear [<<insert name>>],

**Project Title:** Feedback on writing in postgraduate supervision: a study of the social relationships of textual practice in an Australian University.

I am a PhD student, and formerly a staff member who worked in Student Learning (TLC), and I am conducting a study entitled “Feedback on writing in postgraduate supervision: a study of the social relationships of textual practice in an Australian University”. My supervisors are Dr Wayne Martino and Dr James Bell of the Australian Institute of Education.

In my work in Student Learning I was alerted to some of the issues around feedback for students and supervisors. Since little research has been done in the area of postgraduate education, little is known about the responding behaviours of supervisors, their comments about students’ work in progress, and about students’ reactions to these comments. The study has been designed to capture perspectives from both supervisors and students so I hope that you will agree to participate along with your supervisor, Professor/Dr …………………, who has already indicated his willingness to participate.

The purpose of my study is to explore how students and supervisors negotiate feedback through their textual exchanges in the production of a thesis. I plan to investigate students’ preferences for receiving feedback in order to discover strategies for effective practice which impact positively on the quality and effectiveness of supervision. This research also has valuable and important implications for understanding how feedback is experienced in supervisory relationships. It will lead to improved feedback through the documentation of productive approaches, as most supervisors, who in considering what they do in teaching writing, want to believe that their feedback plays a useful role.

You can help by participating with Professor/Dr …………………. What this would entail for you is:

- completing a pre-interview questionnaire
- attending three interviews of no more than one hour each time over one year at six monthly intervals in October 2000, April 2001, and October 2001
- completing three self-assessment forms before each interview
- providing three samples of feedback at the interview
- possibility of attending one follow-up interview.

All information is completely confidential and no data or report will be produced which allows individuals to be identified. I estimate that the time
involvement over one year would be approximately six hours. The benefits of
being involved in this research are that it will be practical and inform your
work with students, for those of you who are tutoring. Also, because it will be
self-reflective for the participants it is likely that you will get more out of the
feedback you will be given.

As indicated above, .......... has already expressed his willingness to take part.
I’d be most grateful if you would reply to this letter by email or ring me
indicating your willingness to participate by [insert date]. I’m sorry for such
short notice, but I would like to get started on the interviews as soon as
possible. Upon receipt of a positive response, I will then send a detailed
outline of what your involvement entails and a consent form for you to sign,
and notify you of the time schedule for interviews.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like more details of the
study design and purpose. Thank you so much for taking the time to read this
and for your help (in anticipation of a positive response)!

Yours sincerely,

Sally Knowles (PhD Student)
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Appendix 4

Pre-meeting Interview 2 Questionnaire

Questions (n=6) for postgraduate students

Part 1 Before the meeting with your supervisor

1. What is the piece of writing you are submitting? (thesis chapter, conference paper? etc.)

2. Is it the first time you have submitted this work to your supervisor? (i.e. is it a new version of a former draft or is it new work?)

3. What sort of feedback are you hoping to get when the draft is returned to you?

4. What difficulties did you have when writing the draft?

5. Are you worried about any aspects of the draft?

6. What are the strengths (good points) of (about) the draft?
Pre-meeting Interview 2 Questionnaire

Questions (n=7) for supervisors

Part 1 To be completed after reading the draft before the meeting with your student

1. Did you discuss the nature of the feedback the student wanted? If yes, did you discuss this before or at the time the draft was submitted?

2. How did you work with the draft of the student’s writing? Were you conscious of giving feedback to convey something specific on this particular piece of writing? Or do you just get down to it?

3. What factors (assumptions, attitudes, values) affected your feedback on the writing?

4. What issues were you concerned to address when you gave feedback?

5. What will help this student respond more effectively to feedback?

6. ‘What expectations do you have regarding the student’s use of the feedback you provided?

7. ‘Were there any other issues or concerns that arose for you? Can you please elaborate on these?

* Indicates the same question was asked to students and supervisors.
Appendix 5

Interview questions
(rounds 1, 2, 3) October 2000 - October 2005

Interviews (round 1) October 2000 - January 2001

Questions (n=7) for postgraduate students
* Indicates a question asked to both students and supervisors

1.  Adjusting to postgraduate studies

1.  A.  How did you find making the adjustment to being a postgraduate student?

2.  B.  Do you now have different views about the role of feedback in supervision from what you did when you first started your candidature?

2.  Advice and support

3.  A.  Tell me the story of the development of the research proposal/programme of study, and how your supervisor provided input.

4.  B.  Tell me about the kinds of feedback you got from your supervisor. What works best for you? What doesn’t work?

3.  Effectiveness of feedback at different stages of writing

5.  A.  ‘What do you expect of your supervisor overall?

6.  B.  ‘What do you foresee will be the biggest challenge in your relationship with your supervisor(s)?

7.  C.  ‘What would you like to gain from your involvement in my research?
Interviews (round 1) October 2000 - January 2001

Questions (n=8) for supervisors

1. Adjusting to postgraduate supervision

1. A. How did you become a supervisor? Can you tell me about how you got to become a supervisor at Murdoch?

2. B. How have your views about the role of feedback in supervision changed over time?

2. Advice and support

3. A. How would you describe your approach to giving feedback?

4. B. What types of feedback do you provide to your research students?

3. Effectiveness of feedback at different stages of writing

5. A. What expectations do you have regarding your students’ use of the feedback you provide?

6. B. “What do you foresee will be the biggest challenge with your postgraduate students?

7. C. What are your greatest challenges? What are you concerned about in your supervisory practices?

8. D. “What would you like to gain from your involvement in my research?
Interviews (round 2) May 2001- November 2002

Questions (n=16) for postgraduate students

Part 2 Straight after the meeting with your supervisor

1. What did you do when you submitted the draft (e.g. draft an email requesting specific feedback?, just sent it off/deliver it? etc.)
2. Did you get the kind of feedback you hoped for?
3. How did you react when the draft was returned?
4. *Were you satisfied with the way the meeting proceeded?
5. Did you leave with any doubts or uncertainties?
6. *Was there anything special about this meeting?
7. What stood out as the most helpful kind of feedback you were given?
8. What was the least helpful feedback you received?
9. Did you experience any difficulties in receiving/"reading" feedback?
10. Were there any surprises for you?
11. What will you do with the draft now?
12. Do you sometimes choose not discuss the feedback you are given on drafts of your work?
13. Do you intend to act on all the suggestions you were given?
14. *What expectations does your supervisor have regarding your use of feedback provided?
15. *Do you get the impression that you are making the transition to writing practices that are similar to those of productive academics? (i.e. drafting and revising to make large scale changes)
16. *Are there any other concerns that you had or are there any other issues that arose during your meeting? Can you please outline or elaborate on these concerns/issues?
Interviews (round 2) May 2001- November 2002

Questions (n=12) for supervisors

Part 2 To be completed after the meeting with the student

1. "Were you satisfied with the meeting?
2. Was the student receptive to the feedback you gave?
3. How do you gauge this?
4. How do you think this particular student is making or has made the transition to writing practices that are similar to those of productive academics?
5. Have you noticed a difference or a pattern in the kind of feedback that male and female students prefer? Or have you noticed a difference or a pattern in the way that male and female students respond to your feedback?
6. What contributions do you least like to make? (prompt: in what circumstances? to grammatical correctness, style, content, logic of argument, analysis?)
7. How did you acquire knowledge of developing writing abilities?
8. What views of developing writing abilities are reflected in your responses to the student’s writing?
9. How do you communicate your rhetorical values? How do you make these explicit?
10. Is it ever appropriate for you to extensively polish the student’s writing where this might dominate the author’s original voice? If there are concerns, what is the best way you have of handling this?
11. Do you believe/consider/think that intervention is justified on stylistic grounds?
12. Do you think it is important to make your pedagogical practices explicit when giving feedback? (e.g. what attitudes you have about ownership of the writing, do you encourage and environment where student must experience themselves as in control, as author of their intentions, as exercising free will and independence?). How to you delineate these things, because there is an ambiguous border line between student’s independence and the supervisor’s responsibility for the quality of the thesis)? What norms do you define/set?
Part 1 Follow-up questions from round 1 & 2 interviews

1. ‘In the pre-interview questionnaire you responded that the most effective way to supervise research students is for the supervisor to help you establish your own voice. In what ways has your supervisor’s feedback facilitated this?

2. ‘In the first interview you stated that what you foresaw as the biggest challenge in your relationship with your supervisor(s) would be ......? Has that prediction eventuated?

(and see also question no. 28)

Part 2 New questions

3. Giving feedback involves “summarising, evaluating, advising, motivating and facilitating, and understanding,” according to Brown and Atkins (1988). Can you comment on which of these you have valued the most from your supervisor’s feedback approach?

4. Have you ever raised issues about feedback with your supervisor? (how helpful it is, what is unhelpful, what needs changing, what works best for you etc.?)

5. In the first round of interviews one supervisor said that she thought that students held back their opinions about feedback. She said:

   Well, it would be very nice to know what sort of feedback students in general found helpful. Because there’s no doubt that from one’s own students you don’t get the full story (laughter). I think very few would say, “I’m absolutely sick of what you’re telling me” (laughter). (Supervisor B)

   Do you agree? Do you refrain from discussing the effectiveness of your supervisor’s feedback. If yes, how does this sort of uncertainty affect your supervision experience?

6. Do you think in hindsight that if your supervisor(s) had talked to you about their pedagogical style (e.g. their approach to supervision and feedback, e.g. attitudes to teaching writing and thesis production) that
you would have had an easier candidature?

7. Do you think the need to be an autonomous scholar places too much of a burden of self-responsibility on a PhD student? Please explain the ways you have dealt with this?

8. What techniques of self control or self management have you found the most difficult?

9. How has your body responded to the difficult phases? (migraines, stomach ache, gastro-intestinal problems etc.)

10. Do you think you have changed over the period of your candidature? If so, in what ways? What contributed to those changes?

11. Do you think your expectations of your supervisor were realistic when you first began your candidature? (remind them of their responses to I/V1 Q3A What do you expect of your supervisor overall?). Did you have any unrealistic expectations?)

12. How would you characterise your relationship with your supervisor in these final stages?

13. Has the feedback changed in these end stages? Please comment on the changing quality/nature of your experiences with feedback in the final stages of candidature.

14. Do you ever doubt the authenticity of your supervisor's feedback? If yes, in what circumstances?

15. Do you think you could have worked independently on your research without a supervisor? Please explain which aspects or phases you consider when this could have happened.

16. What do you when a draft is returned to you with feedback? (make notes and revise later, revise it immediately, move on to other work)

17. Do you find it helpful to reflect on the process of your candidature and your relationship with your supervisor or are you mostly focussed on product?

18. Do you ever discuss the emotional dimensions of thesis writing and research with your supervisor? If so, how do such discussions ensue?

19. What are some of your supervisor’s idiosyncratic writing preferences which you can discern from the feedback he or she gives?

20. Have you at times felt frustrated with the procedures you’ve had to follow when your supervisor has directed you to follow specific strategies?
21. What do you wish could have been done differently with respect to feedback and the supervisory relationship?

22. What has been the most surprising aspect of your PhD candidature?

23. A supervisor commented that she was unsure if students remember oral feedback. She said:

   Whether they did think that written feedback was better or easier or more helpful than oral feedback. Whether they remember the oral feedback. Because I think that’s something that you keep on having to re-say but that’s probably, that might be just what you have to do, rather than people forgetting it or whatever. (Supervisor B)

   Please comment on your experience with oral feedback.

24. What do you like best about your supervisor’s feedback style?

25. Have you found that at times your supervisor is unsure about how to advise you? How do you react in such circumstances?

26. In what ways do you and your supervisor challenge the power frameworks which your respective roles as student (and supervisor) imply?

27. What suggestions would you give to a new postgraduate student about working with a supervisor’s feedback? e.g. one student commented: “I didn’t know what I was allowed to ask for”. (STUF2, 32, IV1)

28. What (if anything) have you gained from your involvement in my research?

   Articles to give them:
   - “Murmurs from Underground” conference paper (Knowles, 2001)
   - “The PhD and the Autonomous Self” (Johnson, Lee & Green, 2000)
   - “It’s a PhD, not a nobel prize” (Kiley & Mullins, 2001)
   - “Fighting for space in supervision” (Grant, 2005)
   - “Factors associated with completion of research higher degrees” (Latona, 2001)

29. Demographics

   - off campus/on campus
   - full-time/part-time
   - length of candidature (f/t equiv)
   - scholarship recipient
   - age
• parent’s professions
• parent’s educational background
• have any other family members attended university?
• sibling’s level of education
• first generation university student?

30. Thesis submission date
Interviews (round 3) May 2002 - September 2005

Questions (n=20) for supervisors

Part 1 Follow-up questions from round 1 & 2 interviews

1. *In the pre-interview questionnaire you responded that the most effective way to supervise research students is for the supervisor to help the student establish their own voice. (modify according to position on scale)

   In what ways have you facilitated this?

2. *In the first interview you stated that what you foresaw as the biggest challenge in your relationship with your student would be .....? Has that prediction eventuated?

   (and see also question no. 18)

Part 2 New questions

3. In what ways do you want the student you are supervising to be different after their years of supervision with you?

4. What kind of academic or scholar do you want your student to be/become on completion of their thesis?

5A. What impact do you see your feedback having on your student as a developing scholar?

5B. What are the kinds of feedback that help your student develop as a scholar?

6. According to Bargar and Duncan (1982), providing feedback is ‘the most complex function the [supervisor] must perform and the most difficult function to perform well’ (p. 28). Do you agree?

7. What are the most important dimensions of feedback for a successful supervision relationship?

8. In the first round of interviews some supervisors spoke about the uncertainties and open-endedness of supervision. Has this been an issue for you in your supervision of student ...

9. Is there anything that you now know about your student that you would have found useful when you were giving feedback to him/her
in the early stages of candidature?

10. One supervisor commented that in terms of the feedback process something happens when she picks up a student’s writing she has to read and comment on as she puts who the author is in the back of her mind. She added that something not very nice happens (not fault finding) but a stance which is critical and disembodied where there is an “objectification of the text”.

Can you describe your reactions to this approach?

11. To what extent does your oral feedback complement your written feedback?

12A. Do you sometimes advise students to delete sections of text? If so, how is this handled?

12B. “No passion in the world is equal to the passion to alter someone else’s draft.” (HG Wells) Does this tendency ring bells with you?

13. What are the most difficult elements of the relationship when you’re working with a text that needs sections deleted?

14. How does this impact on the pedagogical relationship?

15. What is the most problematic form of feedback for you/the student?

16. How much does your feedback reflect on process or are you mostly focussed on product? Please comment on the balance you strike in your approach.

17. “In what ways do you and your student challenge the power frameworks which your respective roles as student and supervisor imply? (prompt: expectation that make/create authority-dependent students; to challenge you and your feedback)

18. What suggestions would you give to a novice supervisor about giving and negotiating feedback?

19. “What (if anything) have you gained from your involvement in my research? In terms of what kind of feedback you said you wanted as a result of your involvement in my research you mentioned …

Articles to give them:
- “Murmurs from Underground” conference paper (Knowles, 2001)
- “The PhD and the Autonomous Self” (Johnson, Lee & Green, 2000)
- “It’s a PhD, not a nobel prize” (Kiley & Mullins, 2001)
- “Fighting for space in supervision” (Grant, 2005)
- “Factors associated with completion of research higher degrees”
(Latona, 2001)

20. Demographics

- no of years of supervision
- no of PhD students supervised
References


Grant, Barbara. (2001). Unreasonable practices: Reading a code of supervision against the grain. In A. Bartlett & G. Mercer (Eds.), *Postgraduate


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