Doctoral dilemmas: towards a discursive psychology of postgraduate education

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Doctoral Dilemmas:
Towards a Discursive Psychology of Postgraduate Education

by
Steven Stanley

A Doctoral Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of
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Dedicated to my grandfather, John Minshall, who values learning for its own sake
Abstract

This thesis presents a critical analysis of the dilemmas of doing a PhD in the social sciences from the perspective of discursive psychology. It aims to contribute to qualitative studies of higher education, especially work in the sociology of education on social science doctoral research and training, and discourse analytic work on the dilemmas of education. It argues that there is a crucial bias in the literature on doctoral study. Much of the theory and research on doing a doctorate has been written and carried out by doctoral supervisors and established academic researchers, rather than doctoral students themselves. As a result, researchers have tended to study supervisor rather than student dilemmas and have left certain gaps in their studies, including the experiential dimensions of doctoral research, the discursive construction of postgraduate identities, and the patterns of ideology and power at play in doctoral student life. The present doctorate on doing a doctorate attempts to fill in these gaps, and at the same time introduces a distinctive critical, discursive, and reflexive take on postgraduate education. Detailed discourse analyses are carried out of in-depth semi-structured interviews with PhD students in various psychology and social science departments in the United Kingdom. The analysis pays attention to the conversational, rhetorical, and ideological patterning of doctoral postgraduate discourse. In particular, it concerns the academic identity work done by the postgraduates, the ways in which they manage particular interactional, self-presentational, and ideological dilemmas in their talk, and the different forms of power that are at play as they carry out their doctorates. In addition, a form of practical, analytic reflexivity is developed in the thesis, whereby the authors’ own methodological and interviewing practices are analysed, along with text of the thesis itself. The general argument is that the topic of postgraduate academic identity proves a good case study for the investigation of some of the hidden dynamics of power, as well as the use of wider ideological values, in the construction of identities in contemporary institutional settings.

Key words: doctoral postgraduate education; discursive psychology; ideological dilemmas; identity work; power; reflexivity.
# Contents

1 Introduction  
2 Doctoral Study in the Social Sciences  
3 Mapping a Discursive Approach to Doctoral Education  
4 Dilemmas of Method and Reflexivity  
5 Content Analysis of Postgraduate Identity Work  
6 Rhetoric and Qualification in Claiming an Academic Identity  
7 Ideological Dilemmas of Claiming an Academic Identity  
8 Power Dynamics of Doctoral Research  
9 Conclusion  

*Appendices*  

*References*  

*Acknowledgements*
Chapter 1 – Introduction

At some point during the course of doing a PhD you are more than likely to be asked what your thesis is about. I myself have been asked this question many times over the last four years. When you tell a person that you are doing a PhD on the dilemmas of doing a PhD, you are pretty much guaranteed to get one of three replies, or some kind of variation on one of them. The first, and the most common, is laughter. Often it is unclear whether the person is laughing at you or with you, of course, but at least one of you gets a good laugh. The second involves the person saying something like ‘oh, that’s very interesting isn’t it?’ or ‘oh, what a fascinating topic!’ after which they then proceed to ask what you are actually doing. (Often there is some puzzlement over exactly what such a thesis would involve.) The third and final reply begins with a long silence, and tends to be accompanied by a blank, expressionless face. (The person appears to be struggling over whether you have offended some deeply held belief they have about research, education, or what should happen in a university.) ‘Hmm,’ they say, ‘that’s very ... reflexive ... isn’t it?’ (This is if they are being polite – I have received more direct criticisms.) As if in response to the enquiries of an interested friend or colleague, the present chapter describes what the present work is about, and makes the case for doing a PhD on doing a PhD. It provides an introduction to the present thesis, as well as a general overview of the thesis argument as a whole. In a similar way to how a person will often evaluate how entertaining, interesting, or important they believe a person’s PhD to be in everyday life, so the present reader must do the same of the present written thesis, albeit in a more formal, readerly way. Hopefully the reader will be persuaded to read on, convinced of the value of exploring some of the dilemmas of doing and writing a PhD in the social sciences.

With the introduction to the introduction out of the way, and before taking questions from the floor, it is important to stress at the outset that the present thesis does not aim to be of ‘help’ to PhD students who are contemplating, or in the process of doing, a doctorate. No practical advice will be given about how to succeed as a postgraduate, or how to manage your supervisor effectively. There are already plenty of self-help guides available on how to ‘supervise’ yourself to quick and successful thesis completion, as we shall see. I am not a supervisor, and
this is not a self-help guide. Indeed, I will go on to suggest that it might actually be *unhelpful* for postgraduates to read the present work whilst doing their doctorates.

The present thesis also does not seek to contribute to policy debates over PhD submission rates in the social sciences. I am not aiming to ‘improve’ the PhD process by making practical suggestions about how supervisors might better supervise their students, or how departments can make better provisions for their postgraduate cohorts. The literature on doctoral education is replete with policy oriented work which addresses concerns such as these.

Instead, the present thesis offers a critical analysis of the dilemmas of doing a doctorate in the social sciences, from the perspective of discursive psychology. Specifically, it will be concerned with the ways in which doctoral postgraduates relate with themselves, with their newly emerging academic identities, and with the academic world in general. There will be an interest in the power dynamics of doing a doctorate, especially the hidden or subtle forms of power at work in liberal educational settings, along with the wider ideological aspects of higher learning. The thesis will also consider specific topics in postgraduate education, such as doctoral publishing, myths and stereotypes of academics and academia, and disenchantment with the scholarly life. The general argument of the thesis is that the topic of postgraduate academic identity proves a good case study for the investigation of some of the hidden dynamics of power, as well as the use of wider ideological values, in the construction of identities in contemporary institutional settings.

The thesis aims to contribute to qualitative studies of higher education, especially work in the sociology of education on doctoral research in the social sciences. Delamont, Atkinson and Parry (2000) claim that there has been ‘far too little qualitative research on doctoral students, their work and training. Many of these important aspects of higher education remain stubbornly invisible’ (p. 134). It will be suggested that the ‘invisible’ nature of doctoral education, along with the ‘invisibility’ of particular aspects of doctoral postgraduate life, are a result not only of doctoral students’ ambivalent or marginal position within the academy, but also because of the particular characteristics of research into postgraduate education, and the positions of the social researchers who have so far studied and written on the subject. There is a crucial bias in the literature on social science
doctoral research which has yet to be acknowledged. This is that much of the
theory and research on doing a doctorate has itself been written and carried out by
doctoral supervisors and already established academic researchers. These
researchers have left certain gaps in their studies, including the experiential
dimensions of doctoral research, the discursive construction of doctoral identities,
and the patterns of power and ideology at play in doctoral postgraduate life. The
present doctorate on doing a doctorate attempts to fill in these gaps, and at the
same time introduce a distinctive critical, discursive, and reflexive take on
postgraduate education. As such, the thesis is addressed primarily to researchers
working in the field of doctoral educational studies, especially those supervisors
and academics carrying out qualitative research on the doctoral education process.
The thesis might also be of interest to academics in general, however, given that
‘[t]he vast majority of academics bear the scars of their postgraduate research’
(ibid., p. 32).

The present thesis is framed within various general debates, both within and
beyond the social sciences, about the values of higher education, the marketization
of academic life, what happens to identities in institutions, the purposes and
contradictory tensions of higher learning, the dilemmas of liberalism, the analysis
of discourse in social psychology, and the development of critical and reflexive
approaches to social research. The experience of doing a doctorate is thus found to
be implicated in a wide range of pressing intellectual concerns. In the remainder
of this chapter, we will briefly consider how the social science doctorate bears
upon some of these diverse themes, firstly by courting questions from an
imaginary reader, and secondly by giving an overview of the structure of the
thesis as a whole.

What is a PhD? To some extent the present thesis is an attempt to answer
this question, and indeed you are reading one right now, but nevertheless some
introductory pointers can be given. My Collins English Dictionary defines a
doctorate as the highest academic degree in any field of knowledge, and a Doctor
of Philosophy as a doctorate awarded for original research in any subject except
law, medicine, or theology. The social science PhD degree is considered both an
investigation of a particular topic area, as well as a qualification which credentials
a person as an academic, researcher, or scholar. The classic division is between
the PhD as an original contribution to knowledge on the one hand, and comprising
advanced research training on the other. In pursuing a PhD degree, then, one is not only acquiring and generating knowledge, but also transforming oneself and one’s place in the world. In the social sciences and humanities a doctorate is often considered a rite of passage to the scholarly life, a status passage through which a person enters the academic world. The bearer of a doctorate is expected to become an ‘expert’ in their chosen field of enquiry and ‘doctored’ in the sense that their self-identity becomes transformed. This transformation can be said to take place ‘inwardly’ (through a process of personal development and knowledge acquisition) and ‘outwardly’ (through a change of social status or esteem). The PhD confers a change of title on the bearer such that the successful candidate becomes qualified as a ‘Doctor.’ The study of doing a PhD is therefore both a study of knowledge (re)production and a study of academic socialisation.

What are doctoral dilemmas? The change of title and change of status inherent in the PhD process neatly brings us to the topic of doctoral dilemmas. From the perspective of the present thesis, to say that doing a doctorate involves the negotiation of ‘dilemmas’ is not to claim that doctoral students have trouble knowing what font to write their theses in, how to make the most stimulating cup of tea, or what to say when faced with the question of what their PhD is about. Rather, doctoral dilemmas refer to those wider, unresolvable dilemmas of common sense and ideology, which structure our thinking and our relationships with ourselves, others, and the world (Billig et al., 1988). They are the dilemmas that postgraduate students inherit through culture and through history, and which are bound up with the organisation of society, patterns of social equality and inequality, and the values of liberalism. Essentially they comprise the contrary themes which allow thinking and arguments about postgraduate life to take place. The PhD degree, for example, is bound up with the dilemmas of liberal ideology, in the sense that the expertise and authority which the qualification confers upon the bearer have the potential to conflict with the values of democracy, where it is believed that everyone should be considered equal. The holder of a doctorate is warranted to speak on matters on which other people might be considered ‘unqualified’ to speak (Gergen, 1989). Thus, the possession of a PhD has the potential to conflict with the egalitarian ethos of a society imbued with democratic norms. Doctoral dilemmas is a phrase designed to capture how the contrary
themes of common sense and ideology come to be negotiated in doctoral study and represented in the experiences of individual postgraduate students.

What do you mean by ideology? The approach to ideology adopted in the present thesis is most readily associated with the 'ideological dilemmas' perspective as developed in social psychology (Billig et al., 1988). According to this approach, ideology comprises shared common sense, and is represented through contrary themes, rather than a coherent totality. People are not the blind dupes of ideology, nor are they entirely free to think how they please. Rather, people's thoughts are structured around abstractly opposed contradictory values, such as justice and mercy, prejudice and tolerance, democracy and authoritarianism. People think and argue with these contrary themes as they interact with one another and participate in social life. Thus, ideology provides the basis for thinking, rather than working to stop thinking from taking place. There is also a critical edge to the way in which ideology is understood in the present thesis, in the sense that ideology is studied for its effects, and for how it is used to maintain relationships of power and inequality (Wetherell and Potter, 1992). The focus is not so much on how ideology 'distorts' social life, but rather with how ideology as a discursive practice works to establish and legitimate patterns of dominance and oppression.

What is discursive psychology? This is the particular theoretical and analytical approach adopted in the present thesis. A discursive psychology of postgraduate education involves paying attention both to the practical and active uses of language, and the wider dilemmas which people can be managing when they interact with one another (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Edwards and Potter, 1992; Billig, 1991). This approach is part of critical traditions in social psychology that involve movements between the personal and the social, the micro and the macro, the contemporary and the historical (Wetherell, 1998; Hepburn, 2003; Parker, 2002). A critical approach to doctoral education involves looking both inwardly to the psychological, subjective, and relational, and outwardly to the societal, cultural, and ideological. Specifically, a discursive approach to doctoral education allows the researcher to acknowledge: firstly, the centrality of talk and text in the constitution of doctoral identities and experiences; secondly, how the particular discourse that is used by doctoral postgraduates is informed by interactional and ideological dilemmas; and thirdly, how the
relationship between the researcher, methodology, and participants are reflexively constituted.

What did you actually do in your study? In-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with 16 doctoral postgraduates and young lecturers who were registered as PhD candidates and in the process of either carrying out or completing their doctoral theses, or waiting for their viva voce examinations. Interviews took place mostly in psychology and social science departments in a variety of institutional locations, including 'new' and 'old' universities and colleges associated with universities in the North West and East Midlands regions of the United Kingdom. Participants were asked about their experiences of doing doctorates, whether they considered themselves to be academics, their views on academia more generally, and so forth. Crucially the interviews were analysed as activities in their own right, rather than as routes through which to gain access to doctoral experiences, views, or memories. As well as studying participants' answers, I also analyse the questions which I asked of them, paying particular attention to how versions of postgraduate life are discursively constructed and sustained by postgraduates in their interview encounters. Thus, the approach to the analysis has a decidedly reflexive spin.

What do you mean by reflexivity? In the most basic sense I understand reflexivity as self-reference. The present thesis comprises research about research and as such it is about itself and refers to itself. Often social researchers do not study themselves, or the practices of those near to them, but rather look 'down' the social ladder to those who are less fortunate. The poor, the dispossessed, and the disenfranchised often constitute the participants, or focus of analysis, in contemporary social research studies. In the present study, the researcher looks 'across' the corridor and indeed 'within' himself, turning the tables on academic enquiry, and taking intellectual development and practice as his object of study. Specifically, a form of practical, analytic reflexivity is developed, which involves studying my own discursive practices, along with the practices of my respondents. Thus, I become a participant, and the thesis as a whole becomes an analytic resource. Along with this self-oriented reflexivity, however, there is also an other-oriented reflexivity, in the sense that academic texts themselves are treated as objects of study, and as locations where postgraduate life and experience are
imagined and negotiated. I apply this approach specifically to the genre of the self-help guide on how to do a doctorate.

Are you not just navel gazing? Not at all. It is argued that a reflexive approach to doctoral education, studying our own research activities and writing practices, is an essential political injunction in the present research context, where the role of the researcher is routinely neglected. It is in this sense that reflexivity can complement an ideological analysis of discourse, revealing the workings of power in liberal academic settings. As such, it allows the researcher to pursue serious ends through non-serious means. A reflexive approach also allows one to talk about other things, such as wider social issues, and develop new lines of enquiry, in a creative and interesting way (Ashmore, 1989).

What do you not cover in your thesis? The thesis does not discuss the viva voce examination, how developmental psychology relates to the doctoral experience, and also structural themes on doing a doctorate, such as completion rates.

Overview of the thesis and a cautionary message

We will now turn to how the thesis as a whole is organized. After this introductory chapter, there are two theoretical or literature review chapters (which respectively outline the social scientific study of doctoral education and a critical discursive approach to doctoral education), one methodology chapter, four chapters of analysis (content and discourse analytic), before the final conclusion chapter. The overview will be followed by a cautionary message.

In chapter 2, the literature on doing a doctorate in the social sciences is critically reviewed, especially work on the experiential dimensions of doctoral study. The chapter sketches out the cultural, historical, and policy background of the British social science PhD, and considers the contradictory views about the nature of the PhD itself. Various research literatures are presented and discussed, including the sociology of education, higher education policy documentation, and guides on how to do a doctorate. It is suggested that the research on doctoral education has so far been largely descriptive and designed to address policy concerns, rather than pursuing critical, theoretical, or analytical agendas. In particular, the themes of discourse, ideology, and power have been mostly
neglected by researchers of doctoral study. Furthermore, the practical role of the researcher is routinely ignored in studies of postgraduate life. For example, researchers of doctoral education rarely consider the questions they ask of their respondents, and the ways in which their position might impact upon what their participants say. This chapter therefore establishes the need for a discursive psychology of doctoral education.

In chapter 3, the theoretical background of a discursive approach to doctoral research is introduced, drawing particularly on forms of discursive psychology which combine the study of ordinary language use with broader social analysis, or 'critical' discursive psychologies. The discursive approach stresses the practical and active uses of language, especially of lay psychological language, where people invoke mental states and inner feelings to perform social actions. From a discursive perspective, psychology lies between people in their discursive interactions, and should be studied as such. This chapter also reviews work in discourse analysis on the dilemmas of identity and the dilemmas of education, especially work concerning the ideological patterning of how people negotiate these topics. The main argument is that it is possible to do a critical analysis of doctoral postgraduate identities and experiences by paying attention to the detailed specifics of discursive interaction.

Chapter 4 comprises a reflexive approach to the issue of methodology, describing how the study was carried out, and at the same time taking my own practice as a doctoral postgraduate researcher to task. The chapter discusses the theoretical and practical issues relating to how the participants were contacted, the interviewing procedure, ethical considerations, transcription, and the procedure of discourse analysis. By 'going reflexive' new avenues in the study of doctoral education are opened up, including how the dilemmas of professionalism are practically managed by novice researchers, and how the practice and writing of 'ethics' can be taken as a topic of academic enquiry.

Chapter 5 presents a content analysis of some of the identity work done by doctoral postgraduates during the course of their interviews, specifically in response to the 'academic questions' they were asked, such as 'do you consider yourself an academic?' It is argued that a content analytic approach can prepare the ground for a discourse analysis, tracking themes and trends, identifying patterns and divergences, across a data set. By analysing my own questions as an
interviewer, for example, it is found that particular assumptions are displayed about the participants through the questions which are asked of them, which have consequences for the answers they subsequently give. Also, postgraduate identity work is found to be a rhetorical project, involving the argumentative use of justificatory warrants, as participants variously claim and disclaim academic identities for themselves. The criteria of what it takes to be an `academic’ according to the postgraduates are discussed, along with the limitations of the content analytic approach.

Chapter 6 is the first of three discourse analytic chapters, in which the discursive domain of doctoral postgraduate interview talk is analysed. This chapter continues to substantiate the rhetorical basis of postgraduate identities, taking three participants from the content analysis who each claimed academic identities for themselves. Discursive analysis is carried out of them being asked their respective academic questions. From a discourse and rhetoric perspective, the participants Ben, Fiona, and Rachel employed quite different strategies in making their academic identity claims. Each participant negotiated a different ‘dilemma of stake’ (Edwards and Potter, 1992) not identified in the content analysis: how to claim an academic identity without coming across as a non-academic; how to create the impression that ‘academic’ is a discredited identity while at the same time claiming that identity; and how not to claim too much or too little of an academic identity. The subtle discursive patterning of the status and anti-status and the desirability and undesirability of an academic identity is also outlined. This chapter illustrates discursively the rhetorical nature of postgraduate identity work.

Chapter 7 stays with the topic of identity work and considers ambivalence in the claiming of an academic identity. The chapter looks in detail at a single participants’ extended response to their ‘academic question.’ Will attempted to claim both an academic and a non-academic identity and the analysis focuses on the interactional dilemmas that this provokes. Along with the local contingencies of the young lecturer’s identity work, the analysis also explores the ideological dilemmas of claiming an academic identity. Traditional ideas of academia come into conflict with contemporary university teaching realities, and the snobbery of minor differences between the ‘PhD’ and the ‘non-PhD’ is also highlighted. In addition, a hidden hand of power is identified.
Chapter 8 is the final discourse analytic chapter of the thesis and concerns some of the power dynamics that can be involved in doing a doctorate. In earlier chapters, the changing nature of power in higher educational contexts was highlighted, and the analysis therefore pays close attention to the particular ways in which power is discursively oriented to in the talk of doctoral postgraduates. The general argument of the chapter is that liberal power, when it is working successfully, is often hidden and buried within particular discursive practices in complex and subtle ways. For example, through the use of pronouns and informal terms of address the student-supervisor relationship can be presented as an egalitarian relationship between colleagues of equal status, and the pressures to publish doctoral work appear to be the result of ‘distal’ forces that are difficult to speak of and hard to identify. Even when an implied abuse of power on the part of a supervisor takes place, resulting in disillusionment on the part of the doctoral postgraduate, the traumatic nature of the crisis may still in a sense be ‘unknowable.’

Chapter 9 is the conclusion of the thesis and brings together what has been lost and found in this study of doctoral dilemmas. The chapter turns back upon the thesis as a whole and considers whether its findings can be applied to itself. Through exploring the presences and absences in the text, another hidden hand of power is identified. As such, it is suggested that the present doctoral thesis both resists and reproduces the power dynamics involved in doing a PhD.

Before moving on to the next chapter, a cautionary message must be given to doctoral postgraduates reading the present thesis. If you are such a person, then it is likely that you are reading this thesis either because you want to know what a doctoral thesis looks like, or because you want to know how better to do your own doctoral thesis. I have learnt from experience that reading other people’s theses is not such a good idea. In comparing oneself with the imagined individual who wrote the tome in hand, one often becomes anxiously competitive. In this sense, I would recommend putting this weighty work down, and returning to your own studies with dignity in hand – try not to think or worry about what anyone else has done in their doctorate. A further reason why reading this thesis might be unhelpful is that becoming aware of the power dynamics and ideological dilemmas of doing a doctorate might not in itself be emancipatory. Indeed, the present work might even be dispiriting for the postgraduate reader, in part due to
the sheer number of dilemmas and contradictions identified therein. The thesis might draw your attention to issues which you need not know anything about, or draw your attention away from your own work, feeding your desire to procrastinate. (There is nothing more ironic than a doctoral student reading a book on doing a doctorate as a way of avoiding doing their own doctorate.) More importantly, reading the present thesis might damage, rather than improve, your relationship with your supervisor. Considering that power is productive as well as oppressive, changes to the supervisory relationship as a result of your newly found ‘bolshiness’ might have adverse consequences in terms of the knowledge that is produced, and the insights that are made. Far be it from me to supervise you though. In the end it is your choice whether or not to turn the page.
In this chapter we will review the mainstream literature on doctoral study in the social sciences, paying particular attention to work in the sociology of education, the self-help guides on how to do a doctorate, and also higher education policy documentation; strands of work which tend to be overlapping and mutually constitutive. Throughout the review we will be concerned mainly with the experiential rather than the structural aspects of doing a doctorate. Research on postgraduate education has given relatively little attention to ‘the experiences, perceptions and value stances of graduate students and their supervisors’ favouring instead themes such as completion rates, selection procedures, and quality control measures (Becher, Henkel and Kogan, 1994, p. 2). The present chapter critically evaluates how the experience of doing a doctorate has been conceptualised and studied in the social science literature so far.

What we will find is that research on doctoral education has tended to be descriptive in character, following policy debates and concerns, and lacking in critical analysis and theoretical discussion. There has, for example, been relatively little discussion of the role that power can play in the doing of a doctorate. In addition, there has been a general reluctance in sociological work to theorise and analyse in detail the experiential dimensions of doctoral study; the psychological and discursive aspects of doing a doctorate have largely been neglected. What is needed, then, is an approach to doctoral education which bridges both psychology and sociology. This chapter will justify why a discursive psychological approach to doctoral education is needed, which stresses the centrality of rhetoric and ideology in the constitution of doctoral student life and experience.

Values of higher education

In recent decades the United Kingdom has seen large scale changes concerning the value which is placed on higher education, relating specifically to the strengthening ties between universities, government, and industry (Thompson, 1970; Anderson, 2001). Concepts such as modernisation (Cole, 1998; Rustin, 1998), marketisation (Fairclough, 1993, 1995, 1996; Chouliaraki and Fairclough.
1999; Gibbs, 2001; Pugsley, 1998), managerialism (Deem, 1998; Ozga, 1998; Miller, 1998; Trowler, 1998), commodification (Fairclough, 1992, 1994), consumption (Fulton, 1994; Piper, 2000), alienation (Harvie, 2000; Mann, 2001), and even McDonaldization (Hartley, 1995) have come to the fore in recent higher educational studies. Much of this work has brought attention to, and criticised, the way in which university institutions have come to adopt the values of the market, rather than traditional academic values. Writing of the political climate around the time of his inaugural lecture in the late 1980s, one academic has suggested that ‘the British government directly threatens the values of academic enquiry. Universities and polytechnics are not expected to pursue knowledge for its sake, but to compete successfully as commercial enterprises. Knowledge must be seen to have its price’ (Billig, 1991, p. 31). Although this comment referred to the previous Conservative government, the trend towards economic instrumentalism in education is similarly evident in the policies of the present government. In New Labour, New Language? the critical discourse analyst Norman Fairclough (2000) claims that the present New Labour government considers learning to be an economic rather than an educational process (p. 75, p. 49). The purpose of higher education is deemed to be to cater to the needs of the national economy, rather than for the advancement of knowledge, or the creation of new generations of academic scholars. In part as a result of these governmental concerns, institutes of higher learning are increasingly marketing themselves as though they are business enterprises, treating students like ‘customers’ and positioning them as the ‘consumers’ of education (Fairclough, 1992, 1994; Fulton, 1994; Piper, 2000). In the contemporary academic market place it appears that ‘[e]very academic product can be assigned a commercial value, as the balance sheets of academic activity are regularly drawn up’ (Billig, 1996, p. 9).

Tensions between instrumental economic and traditional academic values can be found in contemporary postgraduate education policy making. In Graduate Education in Britain Becher, Henkel and Kogan (1994) highlight ‘the increasing emphasis given to economic instrumentalism’ (p. 183) in recent postgraduate education policy provision.

Policy making for graduate education in the UK is in transition. It has increasingly moved into the more visible political arena as its relevance to the economy is identified by
Moreover, specific concerns have been expressed in graduate education policy making about external examining, completion rates, how long students should take to submit their theses, as well as the balance between general research training and candidate’s individual thesis topics. Partly as a result of concerns over submission and drop-out rates amongst its social science PhD candidates, in 1985 the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) initiated a sanctions policy, setting institutional targets for thesis completion rates (cf. Rudd, 1985). Candidates were required to submit their theses within four years of initial registration. Institutions that failed to meet this requirement were ‘blacklisted’ and some became ineligible for postgraduate research support.\(^1\) The ESRC also commissioned an enquiry, indicating there to be a lack of knowledge about postgraduate training in the social sciences (Winfield, 1987). This was accompanied by an empirical study concerning the ‘management’ practices and procedures of social science doctoral education in six universities (Young, Fogarty and McRae, 1987). The study established that there was a lack of agreement about the nature and purpose of the social science doctorate: should the PhD consist of an original contribution to knowledge, or involve advanced research training? In response to the findings of the 1987 study, the ESRC reduced its number of doctoral candidates and developed a studentship ‘competition’ to which students and supervisors were to submit research proposals, outlining the research training which candidates would complete during their first year of study. The ESRC had essentially adopted a ‘training-based model’ for the social science PhD.\(^2\) This was despite the fact that ‘[t]he traditional British emphasis had, up until that time, been on students’ individual research and on the thesis as the sole

\(^{1}\) Even the University of Cambridge was on this list for a period of time (Noble, 1994, p. 29).

\(^{2}\) For their subsequent training guidelines, see ESRC (1991, 1996, 2001). In 1999 the ESRC developed a ‘1+3’ system whereby students who have not previously completed any substantive research training are funded for a one year research training masters degree, followed by three years for a PhD. The empirical work for the present research was carried out before this system was implemented.
outcome of the research training period’ (Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 2000, p. 189). In 1994 Becher, Henkel and Kogan observed that the then recent history of the ESRC had included ‘attempts to justify its subject domains in the face of political scepticism about their usefulness’ (p. 33), and that perhaps because it feels it has the most to prove, it is ‘amongst the most directive of the research councils’ (p. 34).

It is only in the social sciences that systematic research training seems to be relatively common. To what extent this reflects the internal needs of the disciplines in question, and to what extent it is a result of the particularly heavy external pressure from the main public funding agency, the Economic and Social Research Council, is a matter for debate (p. 105).

It is somewhat ironic that research into the social science doctorate has tended to follow government concerns about the state of postgraduate education and training, and in turn has been funded by governmental research councils. Indeed most studies of the PhD have come about as a direct response to broader policy concerns and research council initiatives. For example, in 1988 the ESRC sponsored a national research initiative on social science doctoral research in the United Kingdom (Burgess, 1994). This project was concerned with ‘the process of supervision in years one, two and three; the activities of supervisors and students; the relationships between them and their perceptions of doing a PhD’ as well as issues to do with ‘writing, examining, completion rates and labour market studies’ (p. vii). Studies under this initiative included qualitative and quantitative investigations of the socialization of doctoral students in sociology, business and economics, as well as their entry into the disciplinary knowledge cultures of such fields as social anthropology, human geography, and town planning.

*The Doctoral Experience* study was part of this initiative (Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 2000). It concerns ‘the cultures and the cultural reproduction of academic disciplines ... [and] how the tacit knowledge and cultural forms of academic knowledge shape the identities of academics themselves’ (p. 17). The authors draw upon the sociological work of Bourdieu (1988) and Bernstein, adopting a largely structuralist approach in making sense of postgraduate disciplinary enculturation. Through ethnographic analysis of qualitative interviews with 286 doctoral candidates, supervisors and departmental heads in the natural
and social sciences, they have illustrated how students become socialised as knowledgeable academics and researchers within particular disciplinary traditions (Parry, Atkinson and Delamont, 1994; for a recent reflection on this project, see Delamont, 2003).

Around the same time as the ESRC initiative, between 1987 and 1990, a five-nation study was carried out, sponsored by the Spencer Education Foundation, encompassing Germany, Britain, France, the United States, and Japan (Clark, 1993). This study investigated the 'research foundations' of graduate education and aimed to 'examine comparatively the historical development and current state of research organization and advanced education in the five leading countries of the Western world' (p. xvi). It combined 'macro' studies of the general structures of research and graduate education with 'micro' analysis of the 'faculty-student relationships within university departments' (ibid.). In terms of subject domains, physics was taken to represent the sciences, economics the social sciences, and history the humanities. The study involved analysis of national data, previous studies, as well as interviews with faculty, graduate students, and national officials.

The British component of this study was carried out by Becher, Henkel and Kogan (1994; see also Henkel and Kogan, 1993; Becher, 1993). This project is a contribution to higher education studies, as well as the wider study of public policy. Central to the study are 'the qualitative issues associated with graduate education' rather than the structural themes (Becher, Henkel and Kogan, 1994, p. 2). Together with interviews in physics, economics and history, the researchers also investigated sociology, modern languages, and biochemistry.

Altogether, 80 members of academic staff and 55 graduate students were interviewed across the range of six chosen disciplines in sixteen different institutions ... Detailed notes were taken of each interview, and written up in a fuller and more systematic form as soon as possible afterwards (p. 4).

These and related studies form the basis of the subsequent review of doctoral study in the social sciences. It will be suggested that much research into doctoral

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3 The Winfield Report so radically altered the terrain of the social science PhD that the present review does not consider pre-Winfield era policy making (see Rothschild, 1982; Swinnerton-Dyer, 1982).
education has so far been designed to address issues of policy, and that in order to address issues of theory, it needs to take a next step into critical and reflexive analyses, acknowledging and challenging its own incorporation in the university political climate of the times. By adopting such a stance we can open the way to understanding the ‘ideological dilemmas’ of doing and studying the social science doctorate, as developed in the present thesis.

**Purposes of the doctorate**

The PhD has had a long and complicated history. It took over a century for it to arrive in Britain after it was first introduced in Germany in the early nineteenth century (Simpson, 1983). The lower doctorate was introduced by the University of Oxford in 1917, some fifty years after Yale University in the United States had done the same. Why did it take so long for the PhD to come to Britain? Traditionally, British universities such as Oxford and Cambridge have focused primarily on providing ‘liberal education’ rather than opportunities for advanced study and research.

Historically, the emphasis in British universities was placed on teaching, not research. Emphasis on conducting research, which first gained prominence in German-speaking universities and which was later adopted by universities in the United States, then Canada, was generally not of primary and widespread importance at the universities in Britain until the early to mid-twentieth century; emphasis being given to high quality baccalaurate education (Noble, 1994, pp. 19 – 20).


4 The modern PhD is considered a ‘lower’ doctorate and is commonly undertaken ‘for the purpose of gaining employment in an academic or research institution’ (Noble, 1994, p. 2). The first ‘higher’ doctorate – ‘granted for prodigious research and scholarly accomplishments over a lengthy period’ – was awarded in Paris in around 1150. Although both lower and higher doctoral degrees continue to be awarded, the doctorate of philosophy is now the most common (p. 11).
1835) founded the University of Berlin, a research institution where the creation of knowledge was deemed paramount. Humboldt believed that the state should support the university financially, ‘but that it had no right to interfere in its internal affairs’ (Simpson, 1983, p. 13). By the second half of the nineteenth century, Germany’s overall research productivity exceeded that of all other countries, and ‘[s]tudents from all over the world were converging on her universities to enjoy the higher studies which they could not find at their own’ (ibid., p. 27). It was only at the beginning of the twentieth century, however, that the campaign to introduce the PhD to Britain began to take hold, ‘not so much to entice British students away from Germany but, ironically, to divert to Britain the continuing stream of young American scholars to that country’ (ibid., p. 18). After all, before the doctor of philosophy degree was introduced, neither the University of Oxford or the University of Cambridge could offer systematic instruction for graduate students seeking advanced study or research.

It was in this international context and against a backdrop of increasing educational, economic, and political pressures that the universities of the United Kingdom began to improve their provisions for postgraduate education, and introduced the PhD degree. This introduction was both hastened and hindered by the onset of the First World War, for while there was a need to maintain national prestige and superiority in an age of difficulty and transition, the PhD with its German association ‘was an unpopular concept’ (ibid., p. 132). Nevertheless it was predicted that the coveted title of ‘Doctor’ would attract American students to Britain, and Oxford in its ‘traditionally individualistic fashion’ designated the PhD the ‘DPhil’ (ibid., p. 134). A headline in the New York Times at the time read ‘Oxford Innovation to draw Americans’ and the Times Educational Supplement reported that Oxford was ‘renewing her golden youth at the fountain of national necessity’ (ibid., p. 140, p. 143). The new doctorate was intended to reward ‘the earliest advanced work of young graduates’ (ibid., p. 139), predominantly in the natural sciences, and would involve lengthy study, original research and thesis preparation (Noble, 1994, p. 64). It was essentially to function as an ‘entrance ticket’ or ‘passport’ to the international academic world.

In recent times there have been numerous debates about the purpose of the social science doctorate. Some propose a traditional knowledge-based PhD, in which an original contribution to knowledge is made, along the lines of an
educational apprenticeship. While others suggest that the PhD should involve significant elements of structure and formal research training. Becher, Henkel and Kogan (1994) have suggested that a ‘good case can be made for stipulating that every doctoral student should begin his or her programme by undertaking an element of research training’ (p. 101; see Hockey, 1991 for the arguments for and against). From specific to more generalised conceptions of the doctorate, the division has been expressed in a number of ways: as process or product (Young, Fogarty and McRae, 1987; Salmon, 1992); education or training (Hockey, 1991); general research training or individual thesis work (Becher, Henkel and Kogan, 1994); explicit training or implicit enculturation (Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 2000), and so on. Overall there seems to be a general lack of certainty about the precise nature of the social science PhD (Noble, 1994). ‘It takes a good deal of hard labour, and no one is quite sure what it is’ (Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 2000, p. 35).

Some examiners see the aims of the PhD to be a training for a career in research, some as an introduction to writing books, some as preparation for the academic life and some, as we have suggested, to become a fully rounded professional (Phillips and Pugh, 2000, p. 28).

Despite this disagreement, however,

A common view across the social sciences and humanities is that the doctoral thesis is an individual and original piece of work, the production of which, at minimum, provides the foundation for a career as an individual researcher or scholar (Becher, Henkel and Kogan, 1994, p. 85).

According to this view, the thesis should not be seen as the student’s life’s work, but rather as a first relatively large-scale research study, representing an initial foray into the world of research and scholarship. It is a ‘foundation’ for a subsequent academic career. Delamont, Atkinson and Parry (2000) point out that while the doctoral students in their study stressed ‘how they adored their subject and how doing a PhD was an emotional and intellectual quest for personal fulfilment ... [i]t would be naive to accept such accounts at face value, because the same students saw a PhD as a vocational qualification: they wanted to be university lecturers and career researchers’ (p. 49).
At the level of the individual student, then, doing a doctorate is not only about acquiring knowledge and making an original contribution to a field of academic enquiry. It is also about the transformation of identity. 'Doctoral research produces and reproduces not only knowledge, but social identities as well' (ibid., p. 4). For many the doing of a doctorate plays a central role in the development of an 'academic' identity (Austin, 2002; Henschen, 1993). Becher (1989) suggests that while it may begin at the undergraduate level, the process of developing this identity 'is likely to be at its most intense at the postgraduate stage, culminating in the award of a doctorate and, for the chosen few, the first offer of employment as a faculty member' (p. 25). Doing a social science doctorate is therefore considered part of a 'rite of passage to the scholarly life' (ibid., p. 108). It constitutes a 'relatively prolonged process of status passage' (Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 2000, p. 4), as the successful candidate becomes not only an 'expert' in their particular subject area, but also a 'Doctor of Philosophy.'

A PhD is a badge of legitimate membership: a badge to be worn by the student, helped by the supervisor and tested by the examiners (ibid., p. 34).

PhD 'examiners are indeed testing the students' attempts to join the world of autonomous scholars' (ibid., p. 35).

Overwhelmingly, the assumptions were that the doctorate was a preparation for an academic career and centred on research and, in some cases, scholarship (Becher, Henkel and Kogan, 1994, p. 55; emphasis added).

[W]riting a thesis appears more and more to be a test of stamina – a hellish rite of passage into the academic world (Renouf, 1989, p. 91).

Although it is routinely stated that a social science doctorate is a stepping stone to an academic career, it is often unclear the extent to which doctoral postgraduates consider themselves to be becoming 'academics.' We do not know much, for example, about how students experience the transition from the student to the scholarly life, their levels of consent and resistance to that process (cf. Coupland, 2004). In their study of graduate education in Britain, Becher, Henkel and Kogan (1994) report that of the 55 postgraduate students they interviewed, 54% said that
they wanted an academic career. Of those remaining 30% were either undecided or did not express definite views and 16% said that they did not want such a career at all (p. 155). While this is interesting data, we are left somewhat in the dark about the actual reasons why doctoral students say they want, or do not want, academic careers. What do postgraduates think it takes to become academics, and how far along the scholarly status passage do they consider themselves to be?

We are also left wondering about the experiential dimensions of the development of academic careers. How do doctoral students relate to both themselves and their newly forged identities? In the following sections we will consider attempts to address the experience of doing a doctorate in studies of postgraduate education. Unfortunately there appears to be a general lack of engagement with ‘experience’ in such studies. Even the authors of The Doctoral Experience do not articulate what they mean by the term. While they present interesting examples of the ‘experiences’ of doctoral postgraduates, both social and intellectual, they tend not to explicitly theorise those experiences, explaining how we are to understand them. In Experiencing Identity, Ian Craib (1998) suggests that ‘any sociological account of our world must imply something about the way people experience the world’ (p. 1) but that sociological explanations often tend to deny or ignore people’s experiences. While helpful observations have certainly been made about the experiential dimensions of doctoral study in sociological studies, especially pertaining to the supervisory relationship, researchers have tended to neglect the role that discourse can play in the constitution of doctoral identities, views, and experiences. The following discussion therefore foreshadows chapter 3, in which we will map out a discursive approach to doctoral experience and the study of ‘inner’ postgraduate life.

**Doctoral and supervisory dilemmas**

Merton and Barber (1976) have proposed that social roles display a ‘sociological ambivalence’ in the sense that they are structured around incompatible normative demands. For example, they point out that while doctors are expected to be clinical and objective in their encounters with patients, they are also expected to display a compassionate friendliness. The central argument is that social roles necessarily consist of abstractly opposed normative requirements. In order to carry
out their roles acceptably, social actors must balance and negotiate these contradictory demands. From the perspective of sociological ambivalence the role of the doctoral postgraduate can be seen to be ambivalent, being composed of conflicting and contradictory tensions. After all, doctoral candidates are not straightforwardly students, nor are they strictly members of staff. Rather, in the academic world, they appear to occupy an ‘in-between’ status.

Doctoral research is in many ways a liminal experience. The students stand on the threshold of their academic career. Many are poised between the collective experience of undergraduate education and full incorporation into the academic profession (Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 2000, p. 176; emphasis in original).

According to the research evidence, the role of the doctoral postgraduate is structured around a complicated mixture of both ‘student’ and ‘staff’ demands. The contrary nature of the postgraduate role can be appreciated if we consider the various activities which doctoral students may potentially be involved in during their course of ‘study.’ When teaching undergraduates, attending and presenting at conferences, and publishing their work, for example, doctoral candidates may come across as established members of the academy, almost like lecturing academics or independent research scholars. However, when participating in thesis assessment activities, presenting their work at postgraduate seminars, and being supervised by established members of staff, they appear dependent students or inexperienced novices. Paradoxically, doctoral postgraduates are studying for advanced qualifications while at the same time making original contributions to knowledge. The role of the doctoral postgraduate appears decidedly ambivalent.

As with established academics and undergraduate students, doctoral postgraduates are under various institutional pressures relating to their professional conduct. Delamont, Atkinson and Parry (2000) suggest that in higher education the ‘[p]ressure to complete work to meet externally imposed deadlines is ever present. This applies from the everyday work of the undergraduate onwards, and it is especially acute for the research student’ (p. 15). Tony Becher (1993) has, for example, written of the ‘ever-present sense of time pressure’ for doctoral
students to complete their theses (p. 136). As well as there being pressures to complete work, however, there are also pressures on doctoral postgraduates to publish, especially if they are wanting to pursue academic careers in the future (Brewer et al., 1999; Gaston, Lantz and Snyder, 1975; for a critique, see Fox. 1983, 1984).

Those who were strongly motivated to pursue an academic career saw [publishing] as an important means of establishing their professional identities well in advance of the time when they had to apply for jobs (Becher, Henkel and Kogan, 1994, p. 119).

In the act of publishing doctoral postgraduates may appear to be established academics or researchers rather than inexperienced students. But how does publishing actually work at doctoral level in the context of the supervisory relationship? Research has suggested that supervisors differ in the degree to which they encourage their students to publish (Becher, Henkel and Kogan, 1994, pp. 118 – 120). There also appear to be disciplinary differences in the importance accorded to publishing during the PhD.

There was more evidence in psychology departments than in education departments of students being encouraged to write papers for publication, often jointly with the supervisor. The majority of psychology supervisors indicated that they regarded such initiation into academic life as an integral part of their role as supervisors (Hill, Acker and Black, 1994, p. 67).

No in-depth studies have been carried out, however, of the dynamics of publishing at doctoral level, and the experiences which students have had of it. If in publishing students appear independent academics, what of collaborative publications between students and their supervisors? After all, in the social sciences, ‘taking personal responsibility for one’s work readily implies an almost competitive relationship with one’s supervisor and other more senior academics’ (Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 2000, p. 155), and this might especially be the

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5 The common expectation among supervisors and students alike was that a hardworking individual, not encountering any particular problems in the course of the research, ought to be able to submit his or her thesis in some three-and-a-half to four years’ (Becher, Henkel and Kogan, 1994, p. 127).
case in publishing from a doctoral thesis. Given the contrary expectations of
documental postgraduates being both autonomous scholars and dependent students,
the activity of publishing from a thesis is not likely to be straightforward. Indeed,
the extent to which documental postgraduates are, or should be considered, ‘junior
members of the profession or subordinate novices’ is a sensitive issue (ibid., p.
176). In an early essay on the supervision of documental candidates, Wason (1974)
suggested that ‘the postgraduate lives in an ill-defined limbo between the world of
undergraduates, which he [sic] has outgrown, and the staff with whom he may
begin to mix on more equal terms’ (p. 25). The cautious way in which Wason
suggests that postgraduates may ‘begin’ to mix with staff on ‘more’ equal terms
implies that their relationship with senior faculty members is anything less than
straightforward. It is to the departmental and social contexts of postgraduate
culture that the present review now turns.

It is often acknowledged that social science doctoral cultures are
significantly more individualized – both socially and intellectually – compared to
those in the natural sciences (Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 1997a).

The social scientists reported both social isolation – being lonely – and intellectual isolation
– working alone on their topic. Isolation of both types is a function of the mode of
socialization. Students are socially isolated because there are relatively few of them and
they are often uninvolved in the social circuit of conferences, colloquia and so on. They are
intellectually isolated because they are treated as individual scholars in their own right, each
responsible for his or her own project (Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 2000, p. 161).

It is often claimed that the individualized nature of social science PhD culture,
combined with the ambivalent role of the doctoral student, can result in
postgraduates feeling marginalised, isolated, and alone during the course of their
studies. It has even been suggested that marginality is an inherent feature of
documental education, and that postgraduate research students constitute one of the
most marginalised groups in British higher education (Becher, 1993; Becher,
Henkel and Kogan, 1994, p. 141, p. 147). In several of the institutions investigated
by Becher, Henkel and Kogan, for example, postgraduates were given no
communal room, no desk, and nowhere to leave their belongings. Marginality and
isolation appear to be common features of social science doctoral research
(although for a critique of this trend, see Bartlett and Mercer, 1999, 2000). The
individualization inherent in social science doctoral study becomes especially apparent when we come to consider the student-supervisor relationship, modelled as it is on the traditional idea of an 'apprenticeship.'

In contrast to the natural science model, doctoral work in the social sciences depends on a more individualized relationship between a student and his or her supervisor (or panel of supervisors in some cases). In many social science departments the supervisory relationship may form the main, if not the only, source of support for the doctoral student (Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 2000, p. 161).

The traditional British pattern in doctoral education is of the lone research student being supervised by a single academic (Phillips and Pugh, 2000, p. 193).

The student-supervisor relationship appears to be a central organising feature of the social science PhD. Tony Becher (1993) has remarked upon ‘the weight placed on the student-supervisor relationship’ and the ‘heavy reliance on supervision’ in British doctoral programmes (p. 145). Indeed Becher, Henkel and Kogan (1994) point out that it is not difficult to see ‘how the concept of the doctorate as an individual apprenticeship and the marginalisation of graduate studies may combine to produce conditions in which students are acutely dependent on their supervisors’ (p. 148).

Naturally, in the early days of doctoral study, students and their supervisors are expected to arrange regular meetings with one another. One of the first duties of the supervisor is to discuss with the student their initial PhD thesis proposal, often transforming a general and over-ambitious project outline into something more manageable and realistic (see Becher, Henkel and Kogan, 1994, pp. 96 – 100). Intriguingly, however, research on doctoral education has indicated that there is variability in the accounts students and supervisors give concerning the frequency, duration and agenda of their meetings, as the following extracts illustrate.

Interesting differences emerged in student and supervisor perceptions of frequency and duration [of supervisory meetings], regardless of discipline. Supervisors most often stated that meetings took place weekly or fortnightly for full-timers and monthly for part-timers, whereas students most often reported monthly and two-monthly intervals respectively.
Supervisors also recalled longer-lasting tutorials of one or two hours, compared to students’ reports of thirty to sixty minutes (Hill, Acker and Black, 1994, p. 62).

It is, incidentally, interesting to note that the supervisors’ estimates of the time they allocated to their students were almost invariably more generous than those of the students themselves (Becher, Henkel and Kogan, 1994, p. 112).

Students, almost without exception, saw the agenda being set by themselves, whereas supervisors most frequently reported that it was jointly negotiated. Some students experienced this responsibility as something of a shock after the structure which they had experienced as undergraduates (Hill, Acker and Black, 1994, p. 63).

While researchers often identify such discrepancies in their interviews with students and supervisors, they rarely say anything more than that they are ‘interesting.’ Researchers do not, for example, ask why such variability takes place, or study in detail the patterning of the different versions. Why do students and supervisors tend to differ in their accounts of supervisory meetings? Researchers of doctoral education rarely tend to theorise or analyse the discrepancies between, and within, student and supervisor discourse. This neglect is closely allied to the more general absence of substantive discourse analyses in doctoral education research. Although researchers often present qualitative materials, they rarely analyse them in detail, preferring to take the discourse for granted, and as representing transparent versions of ‘the world’ or ‘experience.’ Talk and text are central features of doctoral education, and so it is somewhat unusual that researchers tend not to investigate them in detail, merely presenting accounts and implying that little of interest can be said of them. (Of course there are exceptions, see the following chapter, and also Delamont, Parry and Atkinson, 1998). In the next chapter we will consider the role that language use, or discourse, might play in the constitution of doctoral identities and experiences, together with the question of variability between students and supervisors in accounts of their relationships. We will find that discursive psychology stresses the importance of language use and dialogue in the constitution of doctoral student thinking, identity, and experience.

As suggested above, initial supervisory meetings represent the beginnings of what are often complicated and nuanced relationships, involving the subtle
negotiation of doctoral students’ autonomy and dependency with regards their supervisors. Noble (1994), writing on the theme of autonomy and dependency in the context of postgraduate research, suggests that the humanities represent the most autonomous field of research, whereas the sciences represent the most constrained (p. 101). Although he does not specify those disciplines ‘midway’ on the autonomy-dependency spectrum, we can surmise that the social sciences are one of them. Successful social science postgraduates are expected neither to be totally reliant upon their supervisors, nor entirely self-reliant. Rather, in order for the relationship to work, a delicate ‘balancing act’ must be performed, between the contrary requirements of autonomy and dependency (Delamont, Parry and Atkinson, 1998).

In the following extract Delamont, Atkinson and Parry (2000) outline the rather elusive and diffuse pattern of control evidenced in the social sciences in contrast to the natural sciences.

In all disciplines and departments control is exercised, as Bourdieu points out, by the established academics over their successors. In both science and social science senior academics exercise authority, but in the natural sciences, control is more clearly hierarchical and overtly structured. In the social sciences the system of control is more implicit, more negotiable, more based on an individual’s personal qualities than on seniority or leadership of a research group (p. 153).

While the supervisors in their study claimed to exercise a range of styles, the ‘hands-off’ style was reported to be the most common (p. 162). Supervisors often experienced dilemmas, however, in allowing their students ‘sufficient autonomy’ while at the same time ‘maintaining surveillance and control over the research’ (p. 176). John Hockey (1994) has similarly proposed that PhD supervisors experience problems in their role management, relating to the level of ‘intellectual expertise’ they offer their students. The supervisor is expected to be the intellectual ‘guide’ and ‘critic’ of the student, but because of official institutional demands that the student’s work should be ‘autonomous and original,’ the supervisor experiences some difficulty in making decisions about ‘the volume, specificity, depth and quality of the knowledge which they impart to the student’ (p. 296). While the supervisor may not wish to transgress formal canons which emphasize that ‘the PhD thesis should be the student’s own work’ (p. 298), there is ‘always the
potential for the autonomous originality of the student's research to be compromised by too much intellectual and emotional involvement by the supervisor (p. 302). Therefore the supervisor should erect 'boundaries' between themselves and their students as a way of managing these dilemmas. What Hockey does not mention, however, is how these boundaries are to be erected in practice, and how the dilemmas themselves are to be managed.

In relation to their supervisor, then, the individual doctoral postgraduate is positioned in contrary ways, from that of 'underling' or 'powerless dependent' to junior or professional 'colleague' (Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 2000, pp. 153 – 154). Merton and Barber's (1976) description of the 'apprentice-ambivalence pattern' (p. 5), which conveys the student's 'devotion to his [sic] teacher pushing him to extravagant praise, his need for autonomy pushing him to excessive criticism' (p. 4) certainly seems appropriate in the case of the doctoral postgraduate.

Ambivalence toward authority has to do in part with one's very real dependence on them and their ideas. The nature of this dependence is continuous and subtle, and it is one that grows out of a well-developed wish to be approved of intellectually by superiors (Taylor, 1976, p. 137).

It is often acknowledged in studies of doctoral education that while the supervisory relationship may not initially be a relationship of equals, it should become progressively more egalitarian as the research continues. Indeed, by the end of their doctorate, the postgraduate should ideally be in the position of a fully-fledged colleague. The main traditions of work in this area, however, rarely go any further than simply making such observations, as the following extracts on power and equality in the supervisory relationship demonstrate.

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6 In a paradoxical sense doctoral candidates are learning from their supervisors how to become independent researchers or scholars, who may themselves go on to be supervisors and examiners of doctoral theses in the future. 'The reason for giving feedback effectively is that through it students can eventually learn how to evaluate their own work and so take over this part of the supervisor's job themselves. In the longer term, they have to be taught how to become independent researchers in their own right' (Phillips and Pugh, 2000, p. 177).
The imbalance of power between supervisor and student was such as to make students highly vulnerable. It was not surprising that one student in the study who was being seriously exploited by the supervisor felt that there was no safe way to complain and get the problem addressed (Becher, Henkel and Kogan, 1994, p. 148).

The concept of the university doctorate has always been clear. As the highest degree that can be awarded, it proclaims that the recipient is worthy of being listened to as an equal by the appropriate university faculty (Phillips and Pugh, 2000, p. 20; emphasis in original).

Instead of a teacher the supervisor becomes a colleague and the relationship becomes less asymmetrical than it was. In fact, this is the central aim towards which your relationship with your supervisor should be working (Phillips and Pugh, 2000, p. 108).

The most satisfying kind of teaching is the postgraduate teaching because at the end of the process the teacher-pupil relationship, in an ideal case, is destroyed. And what you end up with is much nearer to the colleague relationship – among equals. They might not be equal in all respects, but certainly within the area of the student’s own PhD subject. The student should leave here feeling they’re equal (PhD supervisor, quoted in Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 2000, p. 45).

What is lacking is any sustained critical study of equality and inequality in the relations between doctoral students and their supervisors. What are the patterns of power at play in doctoral education, and how are they perpetuated and sustained? Given that control in the social sciences is often implicit, negotiable and covert (Delamont, 2003, p. 113), such analysis is unlikely to be straightforward. It will require the acknowledgement of difficult to identify, irreconcilable values, such as democracy and authoritarianism, equality and expertise, and freedom and control. This is why the study of doctoral education must begin to look beyond the realm of the supervisory relationship per se and consider wider patterns of ideology and control which are not unique to the academy, as we will consider in the following chapter.

In 1988, Cox observed that there were no in-depth studies of the ‘critical relationships on the borders between autonomy and dependency’ in the context of doctoral education (p. 21). This absence has to some extent been remedied, as there are now several studies on the dilemmas of autonomy and dependency in doctoral research. There is a sense in which Cox’s observation still rings true, however, as analyses of the dilemmas of supervision have tended to be written
largely from the supervisor’s point of view. Studies of doctoral dilemmas
generally emphasise supervisor, rather than student, dilemmas (Burgess, Pole and
Hockey, 1994; Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 1997b, 2000, 2004; Delamont.
Parry and Atkinson, 1998; Hockey, 1991, 1994). As a result, we do not know very
much about how doctoral postgraduates themselves experience the dilemmas of
autonomy and dependency inherent in the supervisory relationship. In guides on
‘how to do a doctorate’ dilemmas are often considered from the ‘student
perspective,’ however, and it is to this literature that we will now turn.

How to do a PhD

There are currently numerous guides on doctoral education, aimed at both current
and potential doctoral candidates, as well as doctoral supervisors and examiners.
They include general guides addressing postgraduate students from MA to PhD
level (Burton, 2000; Grix, 2001; Potter, S. 2002; Wisker, 2001), more specific
guides on how to do (Brown, McDowell and Race, 1995; Cryer, 2000; Graves and
Varma, 1997; Phillips and Pugh, 2000; Salmon, 1997) and write (Dunleavy, 2003:
Murray, 2002) PhD theses, as well as guides on how to supervise doctoral students
(Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 1997b, 2004; Lewis and Habeshaw, 1997), how
doctoral theses are examined (Tinkler and Jackson, 2004), and also how young
and established academics can develop successful research careers (Delamont and
Atkinson, 2004). In this section we will examine how the doctoral experience is
conceptualised in doctoral self-help guides. The review does not aim to be all-
encompassing but rather selects two specific texts which are considered
representative of the range of approaches to doctoral study and supervision.

What we will find is that the doctoral self-help guide can be studied as an
interesting ‘hybrid’ literary genre. Many guides on how to do a doctorate consist
of original social research – similar to the kind of work we have already been
discussing – and can therefore serve as useful repositories of research findings and
qualitative data. At the same time, however, doctoral self-help guides – in contrast
to the literature we have so far surveyed – tend to be explicitly supervisory in
character. That is, they often attempt to work as a form of doctoral supervision in
themselves, addressing student readers explicitly, and giving them advice about
what they should and should not be doing with their time. In a way, doctoral self-
help guides are publicly accessible literary instantiations of supervisory practice. and can therefore be studied in lieu of actual investigations of face-to-face supervisory meetings (Delamont, Parry and Atkinson, 1998). After all, if students are to read anything about doing a doctorate during their course of study, it is likely that they will read self-help guides such as these.

Of course, students might not follow the guides that they read, however, and it would therefore be misleading to treat doctoral self-help guides as actual instantiations of doctoral supervision. Indeed, guides on how to do a doctorate might more accurately be considered idealizations of supervisory practice, as they tend to be written by supervisors rather than students. In part due to the fact that they are written by supervisors, guides on how to do a doctorate often come across as rather patronising and condescending. The authors of a recent guide to supervising the PhD suggest that supervisors might want get together with their students and read a couple of chapters from two of the most popular self-help guides during their initial meetings, but that ‘[b]ecause they are student-centred books you [the supervisor] may find them offensive’ (Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 1997b, p. 16). Suffice to say that doctoral students may also find them offensive, despite (or maybe because of) the fact that such guides seek to offer them help and support. Clothed in the rhetoric of assistance and usefulness, they often lead the unsuspecting reader down the path of authoritarianism and economic instrumentalism, as we shall see.

**Student as traveller: the knowledge-based PhD**

Phillida Salmon’s *Achieving a PhD – ten students’ experience* (1992) is not strictly a self-help guide. Nor is it an academic study. Rather it is both of these at the same time, as well as being an articulation of the author’s own supervisory philosophy. The book comprises the views and experiences of ten of Salmon’s PhD students, represented via ‘personal pen portraits’ written by the author, along with ‘illustrative extracts from the jotted notes and expositions which the students offered towards the book’ (p. 5). *Achieving a PhD* represents a traditional knowledge-based view of the doctorate, and argues for the centrality of scholarship, thoughtfulness and creativity. Salmon views research as a ‘process.
rather than merely as a product’ (pp. 4 – 5) and throughout she and her students use the metaphor of the PhD as a ‘journey.’

It is the best theses which make the largest call upon personal resources of time, of thought, of imagination. Such theses, for their examiners, entail a prolonged, necessarily difficult journey, a sustained dwelling within an unfamiliar personal terrain. In the course of this journey, quite unknown ground may be covered, while more familiar scenes may be viewed from entirely new angles. The vistas offered can be alien, both to established views and to one’s personal ways of seeing and experiencing. Yet as a reader, one is carried along by the confidence and conviction of the writer; the guide, the pioneer within this new landscape, moves about in it with a sense of authority (p. 9).

Salmon challenges existing patterns of supervisory practice, arguing in favour of a more supportive style, involving group therapy-like supervisory meetings where students share themselves and their research in a ‘caring, supportive atmosphere’ (p. 90). She also contests assumptions about the ‘typical’ doctoral student. In contrast to the prevailing view that PhD students are young, full-time and funded, Salmon argues that, in reality, the average doctoral student is more likely to be mature, part-time and self-funded (cf. Delamont, 1989). They are students who may take ‘many years’ to complete their projects (Salmon, 1992, p. 2). Furthermore, they might not want to take part in any research training.

What do PhD students themselves think of the addition of a training element to their work? Such evidence as there is suggests that those who are actually engaged in doctoral work see taught courses on research literature or methodology as an irrelevance (p. 3).

In relation to the modern day higher education policy context, then, Salmon seems decidedly out of step, preferring as she does an ‘authorship’ rather than ‘training’ model of the PhD. Nevertheless Salmon reveals that she has ‘achieved a ‘success’ rate well above the usual one’ as a result of her view of research as a process (pp. 4 – 5) – thereby implying that many of her students have completed their theses – even though her emphasis upon the ‘long and difficult inner struggle’ of PhD research (p. 117) will no doubt have caused something of a stir in her own department.
If PhD work is viewed as a process rather than a product, then what matters most is the private thinking, the feeling and imagining, the mulling over the contradiction, possibility and implication, which constitutes the real stuff of original research (p. 20).

This author has no fear of being accused of instrumentalism, being so far from the training model of PhD supervision. ‘Thinking’ is something that is rarely mentioned in higher education policy documentation, or even for that matter in self-help guides on how to do a doctorate (possibly because it implies squandering valuable amounts of time which might otherwise be spent more productively). Salmon should therefore be applauded for re-introducing the term into the doctoral education literature. This might be something of a dangerous step, though, given the present day university political climate.

In spite of the permissive and liberal tone of the book, Achieving a PhD might not be as emancipatory for upcoming doctoral postgraduates as one might at first think. This is because Salmon tends to neglect the issue of power, especially her own supervisory power, despite her proposal that ‘the dimension of power is inevitably present in student-supervisor relationships’ (p. 92). Unlike many other studies of doctoral education, Achieving a PhD does not include extended discussion of the autonomy and dependency inherent in the supervisory relationship. Salmon is concerned to present doctoral study as a ‘private situation’ (p. 1), involving a personal ‘inner struggle’ (p. 15, p. 117) which each doctoral student goes through independently. Supervision is spoken of as a mere ‘shared context’ (p. 5) in which ‘personal support’ (p. 20) is offered. In the following extract we can appreciate the difficulties inherent in describing the process of supervision, while at the same time presenting doctoral study as an individual student endeavour.

Agreeing to supervise a project means undertaking to work in close collaboration with someone who is embarking on a journey within themselves – a journey which may at times be profoundly exciting but which will also certainly be difficult, risky and painful (p. 21; emphasis added).

At one point in the book Salmon suggests that the supervisory relationship involves ‘open communication’ and that it is the student who is in the position of ‘ultimate control’ (p. 17). Later she is keen to stress that ‘[p]rojects which I have
supervised are certainly not my work' (p. 120). As a reader one gets the impression that Salmon is defending herself against something which cannot be said directly. The key to the puzzle lies in the chapter ‘Methodology: a Crumbly Cake’ and the descriptions which Salmon and her students give of their PhD methodologies, and how they came upon them. As Salmon explains:

The adoption of broadly qualitative methods is in fact a common denominator within this student group. And for no one has this been an easy decision. In every case, their academic training has been in conventional quantitative methodology (p. 78).

Although Salmon does not specify here why her students have all adopted ‘broadly qualitative methods’ in their theses, it is suggested elsewhere that each student came by their decision independently, through engagement with their respective academic literatures. For example, Maggie, who is conducting a participant observation of children learning to read, describes her methodological choice in the following way.

There are vast tomes in the library devoted to reading research, but most are derived from short sharp experimental manipulations. The credibility gap between this kind of work and the reading process is so great that it reduces the viability to almost nil, in my opinion. So I have decided that I need to use qualitative methodology (p. 78).

The point is not that this student is lying or deceiving herself in any way, but just to highlight how the methodological choice to go for a qualitative approach is not described as a mutual decision arrived at between student and supervisor. The student cites academic or intellectual reasons for her individual choice. When we consider Salmon’s own accounts of her students’ methodological choices, however, we begin to suspect that something more than mere independent student choice is taking place.

Susan’s efforts to develop appropriate modes for her own research led her, inevitably, to opt for a qualitative rather than a quantitative methodology (p. 77; emphasis added).

Lesley, too, experienced a major breakthrough when she finally turned her back on conventional ways of analysing the puzzling and intriguing material she had gathered (p. 80; emphasis added).
Is it not something of a coincidence that all of Salmon’s students independently adopted qualitative approaches as their research methods of choice, moving as they did from previously quantitative allegiances? Salmon evidently has some level of stake in the matter, being their supervisor. The closest that Salmon gets to suggesting she might have had something to do with her students’ methodological decisions comes towards the end of the chapter, albeit in a rather oblique and indirect way.

Methodological decisions entail coming to terms not only with one’s own personal situation, values and beliefs, but also with the whole intellectual ethos which pervades research. Whatever choices are made, *some inner accommodation must be reached with the intellectual establishment* (p. 84; emphasis added).

It might have been more accurate to say – in the words of the quotation – that the inner ‘accommodation’ which students are required to make is with Salmon as the supervisory ‘intellectual establishment’ in this context, though it is unlikely that she would describe events in such a way.

The main problem with *Achieving a PhD* is that Salmon does not fully acknowledge her own role as a doctoral supervisor, and as a central figure in the construction of her students’ accounts. She does not place a question mark over the activity of asking her own students about their supervisory experiences, and the constitutive role that their relationship might have played in the formulation of their accounts. The general absence of any negative evaluations of her supervisory practice attests to the unusual context in which her students were invited to tell of their experiences. And the fact that Salmon is the sole named author of the book, even though much of the text constitutes written contributions from her students, attests to the potentially divisive nature of power in liberal academic contexts. As Salmon herself remarks,

> Political considerations are seldom recognised in the discussion of academic life, where the discourse of scholarship and rationality tends to preclude the acknowledgement of power dynamics ... That academic power is seldom made explicit can create real problems for students (p. 93).
Student as professional: the training-based PhD

The bestselling *How to get a PhD* by Phillips and Pugh (2000) is now in its third edition. It is a popular and well-known ‘handbook and survival manual, providing a practical, realistic understanding of the processes of doing research for a doctorate’ (back cover). The book is mostly addressed to postgraduate students, although chapter 11 ‘How to supervise and examine’ is addressed primarily to supervisors. The authors stress that ‘the PhD is primarily a research training exercise to get you from being a mere beginner in research to the level of a full professional’ (p. 51; emphasis in original). Thus the book is packed full of practical information and advice concerning ‘the processes of effective doctoral education’ (p. xv).

The ideas in this book are all based on systematic study, over many years, of the PhD in operation. Taken as a whole they form the basis of a coherent reappraisal of the system and thus make a contribution to the developments currently being introduced. As well as improving the quality and completion rates of doctorates, these policies would greatly improve the experience that individual students have of actually doing a PhD (p. 218; emphasis in original).

In writing *How to get a PhD* Phillips and Pugh have drawn upon their ‘experience in doctoral supervision’ and ‘systematic research into PhD education’ to present real life examples of students and their supervisors, in faculties such as Arts, Business Studies, Science, Social Science, and Technology (p. 5). Many important and challenging issues are raised throughout the book, including the psychological aspects of the PhD process (pp. 75 – 83), as well as the notion of originality in doctoral work (pp. 63 – 64), although this latter concept is used in a somewhat limited fashion. Early on in *How to get a PhD* the authors point out that ‘[t]he British PhD is awarded for an original contribution to knowledge ... examiners need to be satisfied that the work has a degree of originality and that it is the unaided work of the candidate’ (p. 28). Later, however, they offer the sage-like advice that ‘[i]t is a wise student who decides to postpone the pleasures of attempting to be totally original until after the PhD has been obtained’ (p. 53). Unlike the students in *Achieving a PhD* – who appear to have almost unlimited
time to come up with their uniquely original ideas – in *How to get a PhD* students are encouraged to work within a more restrictive notion of originality.

Phillips and Pugh’s stance on originality is understandable given that they conceive of the PhD as a research training exercise where the overall aim is to develop the professional competence of the doctoral candidate (p. 4).

There are many reasons why people decide to work towards a PhD. One of the most common aims at the beginning is the wish to make a significant contribution to the chosen field ... another important aim for many postgraduates is to enhance career opportunities and future earning capacity through possession of the PhD degree (pp. 23 – 24).

Unlike Salmon, Phillips and Pugh consider the doctoral ‘product’ more important than the ‘process’ of acquiring it. They espouse an instrumental view of postgraduate research, where ‘PhD-getting’ is prized as the central objective of doctoral study and supervision (p. xvi, p. 2). To get a PhD a research student must be ‘effective’ and ‘make use of all the opportunities offered’ (p. 14). They must also exhibit ‘initiative,’ considering that ‘[t]he necessity for personal academic initiative is the key cultural change that doctoral students will encounter compared with their undergraduate days’ (p. 4). In a section entitled ‘Selecting your supervisor’ the authors stress that although students do not commonly select their supervisors – they are often allocated to them by the department – ‘you should certainly attempt to do so’ (p. 11). There is also ‘certain basic information’ that one needs to know in order to be confident that a particular academic is going to be an ‘appropriate’ supervisor.

The key factor is whether the academic has an established research record and is continuing to contribute to the development of his or her discipline. The questions you need to ask include the following: Have they published research papers recently? Do they hold research grants or contracts? Are they invited to speak at conferences in Britain and abroad? Positive answers to at least some of these questions are desirable (*ibid.*).

According to this view a doctoral student resembles a highly-motivated and well-informed academic ‘shopper.’ They have done their consumer research, and are looking for the right supervisory ‘product’ with all the appropriate research qualifications. The questions which students are instructed to ask potential
supervisors come across as somewhat peculiar, however, as they resemble the kinds of questions that academic candidates being interviewed for university lecturing positions are often asked. Publication record, grant holding status, international renown: it is as if students are being instructed to assess their potential supervisors against RAE-style productivity indicators. What better way to turn them off you as a potential student? It is, in any case, a moot point whether a person in possession of such qualities would make a good PhD supervisor, or someone who is available and interested in their students and their work.

It appears How to get a PhD – in contrast to Achieving a PhD – implicitly adopts a commercial model of doing a doctorate. A student and their supervisor are, for example, expected to develop a ‘psychological contract’ with one another – a statement of expectations based upon the ‘oral contract’ which has already been agreed – before coming to a mutually beneficial compromise (pp. 182 – 184; see also Noble, 1994, Appendix G for an example of a PhD contract). This, Phillips and Pugh suggest, underlines the fact that both supervisor and student are in a ‘partnership’ with one another. Here doctoral supervision is viewed as something like a small business enterprise, where two parties draw up a contract and negotiate terms of service, as if equals. Student and supervisor are essentially pictured as business partners, each having mutual rights and obligations. Indeed, elsewhere in the book, supervision is described in precisely these terms. The authors explain how,

in the humanities and social sciences students often come with their own topics within the field in which the supervisor is expert, and academics give a service of research supervision (p. 3).

As well as those who wish to get the work done as speedily and efficiently as possible, there are those supervisors who are genuinely interested in producing more and better researchers. They are prepared to offer a service of supervision to postgraduate students in the same way as they offer a service of teaching to undergraduate students (p. 27).

This view of the doctorate implies a very different power relationship to that described in the sociology of education literature. There, it is assumed that supervisors have power over their students, rather than the other way around. If postgraduates are consumers, however, then they may come to expect good
service from their supervisors. Equally, if they resemble entrepreneurs or young business people, then they will expect their supervisors to abide by their contractual agreements. In this sense we can understand how Phillips and Pugh can include a chapter entitled ‘How to manage your supervisor’ and that in this chapter they suggest individual doctoral students should ‘try to make the relationship with your supervisor as far as possible a shared, if inevitably asymmetrical, partnership’ (p. 113). This kind of proposal only makes sense if postgraduate students possess the power and authority of the consumer, which potentially reverses the traditional authority of the university. We will consider this and related issues in more detail in the following chapter.

In their chapter on how not to get a PhD, Phillips and Pugh claim that ‘none of us,’ research students or research supervisors, want to become ‘millionaires,’ and that although ‘there are many ways of making a million pounds … doing a PhD is not likely to be one of them’ (p. 34). Nevertheless, as we have discovered, How to get a PhD is replete with the values of business, commerce, and instrumentality. It remains to be seen whether postgraduate students themselves evoke instrumental economic or traditional academic values in their accounts of their PhD experiences.

**Concluding remarks**

It is clear that the guides on how to do a doctorate – and indeed some of the wider research literature on doctoral education – comprise unexplicated and contestable assumptions about doctoral study and supervision, and that these are often implicit and buried within particular conversational or textual practices in complex ways. Problematic assumptions such as these may continue to pass by unnoticed if we do not acknowledge the practical activity of doing and writing doctoral research. It is unfortunate that the practical role of the researcher is routinely ignored in studies of postgraduate education. It is rarely acknowledged, for example, how many studies of doctoral research are carried out and written by supervisors and established academic researchers. The authors are invisible partly because the questions they ask of their postgraduate respondents are never presented and analysed along with the answers.
What is needed, then, is a study of doctoral education in which student talk is not prompted by supervisory questioning. This study will require a critically reflexive research approach, stressing the centrality of discourse in the constitution of doctoral student life, and which has the potential to reveal patterns of power and inequality at play in academic contexts. The marginalised or ‘in-between’ status of doctoral postgraduates makes them a good case for the study of power and ideology in the academy, for sometimes they may see things which those in power do not, having yet to be socialised into the established academic traditions. Doing a doctorate on doctoral study has a similar potential to reveal what might otherwise remain hidden in doctoral research and education. And just as doctoral students are ‘in-between’ in their academic status, so to study their experiences we need to draw upon a field of study which is ‘in-between’ disciplines, and able to study things which other fields cannot. In the following chapter we will outline discursive studies of higher education and identity which place power and ideology at the center of their concerns.
Chapter 3 – Mapping a Discursive Approach to Doctoral Education

In this chapter we will prepare the theoretical ground for the forthcoming analytic chapters, mapping an approach to the study of doctoral education that is based in the perspective of discursive psychology. Over the past 15 years, discursive psychology has established a distinctive theoretical position, as well as a wide body of empirical research, that has developed methodologies from conversation analysis, discourse analysis, and rhetoric. The present chapter does not aim to provide a comprehensive overview of this work, but rather highlights theory and research relating to doctoral education and issues of identity, ideology, and power. The general focus is upon discursive studies which combine the situated study of language use with broader social analysis of social issues. The main argument of the chapter is that it is possible to do a critical analysis of doctoral education by paying attention to the detailed specifics of postgraduate talk. We will consider studies of doctoral education that invoke notions of discourse, rhetoric and power, as well as discourse analytic work on the dilemmas of education. Central concepts such as identity work, ideological dilemmas, and reflexivity will be introduced and discussed. The overall aim is to move towards a theoretical and analytical perspective on doctoral education which stresses the centrality of discursive interaction, power, and ideology in the constitution of doctoral postgraduate life. Thus the present thesis attempts to combine theoretical awareness with empirical sensitivity in a critical way.

Discursive psychology and ‘inner’ life

Discursive psychology comprises an eclectic approach to the study and conceptualisation of social psychology, employing theories and methods from a variety of disparate fields, including ordinary language philosophy (Austin, 1975; Wittgenstein, 1958), ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (Garfinkel, 1967; Sacks, 1992), literary theory (Bakhtin, 1981; Voloshinov, 1973), rhetoric (Billig, 1996), and discourse analysis as pioneered in the sociology of scientific knowledge (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984/2003). One of the central arguments of discursive psychology is that psychologists and social researchers have often been
looking for the subject matter of psychology in the wrong place. Instead of assuming that psychological phenomena such as attitudes, memories, beliefs and so on are internal mental states, existing within the heads of individuals, they should instead look to the outward use of 'psychological language' in social life, and study how people use such language to perform social actions (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Edwards and Potter, 1992; Edwards, 1997).

Discursive psychologists follow the later philosophy of Wittgenstein (1958) by proposing that words acquire their meaning in part through how they are used in a language. The later Wittgenstein, or Wittgenstein II (Edmonds and Eidinow, 2001), was critical of the 'picture' theory of language, whereby words gain their meaning through a correspondence relationship with the objects they stand for, and instead proposed the metaphor of language as a 'toolkit.' To find the meaning of a term we need to examine how it is used, rather than what it stands for: 'philosophers should start with a consideration of meaning that comes from inspecting actual uses of language' (Potter, 2001, p. 40). Wittgenstein was especially critical of the assumption that 'mental phrases' such as 'I think' or 'I feel' describe inner phenomena, such as thoughts and feelings, arguing instead that people use such words to perform deeds and social acts. The meaning of the statement 'I feel jealous' will for example depend upon the context in which it is uttered, and what the speaker is doing in saying such a thing. Whereas the 'language games' that Wittgenstein studied were often made up, discursive psychologists have taken his broad stance and applied it to the empirical study of talk. This involves looking at outward interaction rather than the supposed inner processes of individual speakers.

As well as emphasising the practical and active uses of language, discursive psychologists have also stressed the rhetorical and dialogical quality of human

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7 Talking about our inner states is not a matter of accurate reporting. If someone asks "How do you feel about me?" there is no looking inward to locate the answer' (Gergen, 1999, p. 101).

8 Discursive psychologists have studied, and in turn respecified, a variety of traditional and non-traditional psychological topics, including attitudes (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Billig, 1991), memories (Middleton and Edwards, 1990a; Edwards and Potter, 1992), prejudice (Billig, 1985; Wetherell and Potter, 1992), emotions (Edwards, 1999; Billig, 1999a), and facts (Potter, 1995, 1996). The present review gives a partial representation of this work, focusing on identity, power, and ideology.
thinking (Billig, 1996; Shotter, 1993a, 1993b; Shotter and Billig, 1998). Drawing, for example, on the literary theories of Bakhtin and Voloshinov, they have proposed that meaning is established reciprocally between people in their dialogic interchanges with one another. Each utterance is given meaning only in the flow of conversational interchange. As Voloshinov (1973) remarks in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language:*

>A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends upon me, then the other depends upon my addressee (p. 86).

>[M]eaning is realized only in the process of active, responsive understanding (p. 103).

>Any utterance – the finished, written utterance not excepted – makes response to something and is calculated to be responded to in turn (p. 72).

In *Celebrating the Other,* Sampson (1993) proposes that ‘[t]he heart of any dialogic argument is its emphasis on the idea that people’s lives are characterized by the ongoing conversations and dialogues they carry out in the course of their everyday activities, and therefore that the most important thing about people is not what is contained within them, but what transpires between them’ (p. 20; emphasis in original).9 This dialogism has parallels with developments in conversation analysis, a subfield of sociology, which aims ‘to discover how participants understand and respond to one another in their turns at talk’ (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998, p. 14). The central finding of conversation analysis is that ‘ordinary talk is a highly organized, ordered phenomenon’ (p. 13), and therefore conversation analysts study the structural organization of talk-in-interaction.

In conversation analysis, ‘the production of utterances, and more particularly the sense they obtain, is seen not in terms of the structure of language, but first and foremost as a practical social accomplishment’ (ibid., p. 14). This active and social view of meaning is evidenced in how ‘speakers display in their sequentially ‘next’ turns an understanding of what the ‘prior’ turn was about’ (ibid., p. 15). Thus, in a paradoxical sense, each turn in a conversation gains its meaning in part through how it is taken up by one’s interlocutor. The meaning of a turn does not

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9 ‘There is no meaning that is not derived from relationship itself’ (Gergen, 1999, p. 131).
so much reside in the turn itself, or in the mind of the person who spoke it, but rather in how it is taken up and responded to by the other person in the conversation. Discursive psychologists have followed the recommendation of conversation analysts to attend to how people display their understandings of what they are doing in their conversational interactions, analysing the observable and hearable specifics of talk-in-interaction (on the influence of conversation analysis on discursive psychology, see Edwards, 1995, 1996; Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995).

Discursive psychology applies the methods and insights of discourse analysis to the study of psychological topics, drawing specifically on discursive traditions in social psychology (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) and the sociology of scientific knowledge (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984/2003). In early work in discourse analysis, discourse is established as a topic of study in its own right, rather than as a transparent medium through which we can gain access to other phenomena, such as the ‘mind’ or the ‘world.’ An open definition of discourse is adopted, which includes all forms of speaking and writing. Potter and Wetherell (1987) refer to discourse as talk and text as social practices, thereby pointing to the pervasive ‘action orientation’ of discourse. The principles of function, construction and variation are proposed, which capture how people use discourse to do things, construct versions of events, and often tend to display variability in their attitudes and accounts. ‘The principle tenet of discourse analysis is that function involves construction of versions, and is demonstrated by language variation’ (p. 33).

In order to better illustrate some of the themes of discursive psychology, a study from the doctoral education literature can be cited. In the previous chapter, we discussed some of the dilemmas of doctoral supervision, and how supervisors must create a ‘delicate balance’ between the tight control of their students and non-interventionist supervision. In their paper on the balancing acts of supervision, Delamont, Parry and Atkinson (1998) illustrate how the supervisors in their study, when asked to reflect on their supervisory practices, often contrasted their past and present experiences of supervision. The supervisors suggested that, as students, they had been poorly supervised, and contrasted these experiences with their current supervisory practices, which they implied were better organised and more supportive. The authors stress that they do not treat these stories of negative past experiences as ‘true’ in any absolute sense, nor do
they dismiss them as ‘fictional.’ Instead, they are best understood as ‘rhetorical devices’ used to perform particular social activities, such as presenting the supervisor and their colleagues in a positive light (p. 166).

This study relates to work in discursive psychology on how, in talking about the past, speakers are doing more than straightforwardly accessing ‘memories’ stored in their heads, or representing ‘the truth’ about past events. Rather, they can be doing deeds and managing dilemmas, relating to the specific interactional demands of the moment. Middleton and Edwards (1990b) consider ‘remembering and forgetting as inherently social activities’ (p. 1) that are ‘embodied and constituted within the pragmatics of ordinary social and communicative practices’ (p. 10). For example, speakers will often perform their recollections of the past in joint collaboration with others. Middleton and Edwards celebrate the value of studying remembering and forgetting as ‘kinds of social action, rather than as properties of individual mentality’ (p. 19), and recommend the analyst to attend closely to the possible actions people might be performing in making their ‘memory claims’ (see also Billig, 1999a).

The ‘delicate balances’ study also relates to work in rhetorical psychology on the argumentative nature of thinking (Billig, 1991, 1996). Billig’s conception of rhetoric is deeper and broader than the ‘contrastive rhetoric’ described in the supervisory dilemmas paper, however, as thinking itself is considered to be rhetorical. Billig emphasises the ‘two-sidedness’ of everyday thinking and how thoughts themselves are modelled upon public dialogues. Drawing upon insights from the ancient tradition of rhetoric, Billig criticises contemporary work in cognitive psychology on the nature of thinking. He criticises the image of the thinker as a rule-follower or organizer of information, and instead stresses the rhetorical, or argumentative, nature of thought. The thinker is pictured as an arguer or debater, for as we think we are arguing, both with ourselves and with others. The use of contrastive rhetoric in the ‘delicate balances’ paper is an example of the contrary nature of common sense, as ‘past’ and ‘present’ comprise contradictory argumentative themes, which enable people to think and argue. The rhetorical nature of thinking is such that when people speak for a particular version of events, they can also often be heard arguing against some alternative version of events, whether potential or actual.
The meaning of discourse used in an argumentative context must be examined in terms of the contest between criticism and justification... one should not examine merely the words within that discourse or the images in the speaker's mind at the moment of utterance. One should also consider the positions which are being criticized, or against which a justification is being mounted. Without knowing these counter-positions, the argumentative meaning will be lost (Billig, 1996, p. 121).

In rhetorical psychology everyday thinking is also considered ideological, in the sense that it has a wider history and relates to patterns of domination and power. ‘The subject of ideology is a rhetorical being who thinks and argues with ideology’ (Billig, 1991, p. 2). Indeed, the academics in the ‘delicate balances’ study were not merely talking about any kind of past and present, but times when they were supervised by senior academics, and when they themselves acted as supervisors to their own students. Thus the contrastive rhetoric was not used merely to present the self in a positive way, but to explain and justify patterns of privilege and inequality. There is also an added historical dimension, for as the supervisors argued, they were participating in wider debates and arguments which were not purely their own. Delamont, Parry and Atkinson (1998) point out that the accounts given in their study were not characterised by ‘myths of a lost golden age’ because supervisors suggested that they had not been supervised very well in the past (p. 170). The actual pattern of accounting used by the supervisors – which comprised a progressive historical narrative implying ‘things are getting better’ – might itself be ideological, as it works to justify the present day status quo of higher education policy and practice (cf. Billig, 1990; Wetherell and Potter, 1992; Edley and Wetherell, 2001). Thus ‘the rhetorical approach likens our conversations to scaled down versions of the great debates of history’ (Billig, 1996, p. 186). Rhetorical psychology stresses the importance of placing arguments in their social and historical context, acknowledging the argumentative and ideological aspects of everyday thinking and reasoning (see Billig, 1992). We will consider in more detail the particular meaning given to the term ‘ideology’ in studies of discourse and rhetoric below.

When people speak about their experiences, then, they can be performing social actions and negotiating dilemmas, rather than simply representing prior states of affairs in a straightforward way. We will now turn to the issue of variability in accounts of experience – one of the principle and unifying themes of
discursive psychology – and the related concepts of interpretative repertoires and ideological dilemmas.

Variability, repertoires, and dilemmas

The previous chapter highlighted how studies of doctoral education have found considerable variation between doctoral students and their supervisors in their accounts of supervisory meetings. There was found to be disagreement between students and supervisors concerning the frequency, duration, and responsibility for setting the agenda of meetings. Students often reported infrequent meetings of a short duration which they set the agenda for, which contrasted with supervisors’ claims of longer and more regular meetings involving mutual responsibility for agenda setting. Researchers of doctoral education have tended not to dwell on evidence of intersubjective variability, and in a sense this is not surprising, given that their studies tend to run on an (often unarticulated) notion of discourse as a transparent medium which functions to reflect the ‘reality’ of thoughts and events. Any thoroughgoing investigation of variability between and within participant accounts is likely to have crucial consequences for representational understandings of discourse, and indeed for what is to be considered the ‘real’ and ‘true’ versions of events (Pollner, 1974, 1975, 1987; Potter, 1996).

Discursive psychologists treat variation in accounting as an analytic ‘lever’ rather than as a problem to be solved or avoided. They propose that variability can give important clues about the contextual, functional, and argumentative features of the discourse being analysed (Edwards and Potter, 1992). The earliest study in discourse analysis to bring sustained attention to the phenomena of variability in accounts is Opening Pandora’s Box by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984/2003). This is a study in the sociology of scientific knowledge,10 which modestly aims to draw

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10 Steve Woolgar explains that ‘SSK is a vigorous (some would say virulent) subdiscipline, as energetic in its research production as it is contentious in its epistemological predilections, which has become increasingly influential both within the history and philosophy of science and in sociology and social science more generally. The central achievement of SSK has been the demonstration that even the most esoteric features of scientific and mathematical knowledge can be understood as social constructs; that scientific facts are not so much reflections of the world as persuasive texts, accomplished within and shaped by a complex of contingencies and
attention to some 'methodological and analytical weaknesses in previous sociological work on science' (p. 1). The authors take biochemistry as their focus, and problematise the assumption that sociologists can construct definitive versions of scientists' actions and beliefs, arguing instead that scientists' discourse is characterised by marked variability and contradiction.

The degree of variability in scientists' accounts of ostensibly the same actions and beliefs is, in fact, quite remarkable. Not only do different scientists' accounts differ; not only do each scientist's accounts vary between letters, lab notes, interviews, conference proceedings, research papers, etc.; but scientists furnish quite different versions of events within a single recorded interview transcript or a single session of a taped conference discussion (p. 11).

Gilbert and Mulkay propose that this 'interpretative variability' in accounts can become a fruitful object of sociological study. Indeed, discourse analysis is introduced principally as a method for investigating such variability.

For traditional sociological analysis of social action ... participants' interpretative variability causes fundamental, and perhaps insoluble, difficulties. In this book we intend to begin to develop an alternative form of analysis which turns this intractable methodological liability into a productive analytical resource. We refer to this form of analysis as discourse analysis (p. 13).

Much of Opening Pandora's Box comprises discourse analysis of the variability in scientists' accounts of their own work and of the work of their colleagues in a variety of formal and informal settings. The concept of the 'interpretative repertoire' (or 'linguistic repertoire') is introduced, which is a 'lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 138). Gilbert and Mulkay discovered that the scientists they interviewed employed two different repertoires in their discussions of scientific work: empiricist and contingent. The 'empiricist repertoire' predominated in formal research papers, stressed the primacy of circumstances. This is a significant achievement because it shows that no kind of knowledge need be exempt from critical scrutiny: in particular, scientific knowledge need not be considered a special case' (Woolgar, 1989, p. xvii).
experimental data, and lacked any mention of the scientists’ personal involvements, judgements, or commitments. In the empiricist repertoire, ‘the facts’ were implied to speak for themselves. The ‘contingent repertoire,’ by contrast, was prevalent in informal interviews, and stressed the role of speculation, personal characteristics, and social ties. ‘The basic principle of the contingent repertoire was that professional actions and beliefs are crucially influenced by factors outside the realm of empirical phenomena’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 149).

Gilbert and Mulkay were interested in how the biochemists they interviewed accounted for the ‘truth’ and ‘error’ of experimental results, and found that they accounted for ‘correct’ and ‘false’ beliefs in contradictory ways. Simply, when accounting for the ‘truth’ of their own scientific beliefs they used the empiricist repertoire, and when accounting for the ‘errors’ of other scientists, they used the contingent repertoire. This asymmetrical accounting pattern solved an ‘interpretative dilemma’ relating to the holding of contrary beliefs that, on the one hand, the facts arise ‘naturally’ from experimental findings, and on the other, that fellow scientists regularly seem to get their findings ‘wrong’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, pp. 152 – 153).

The essential message to take from Opening Pandora’s Box is that accounts and beliefs are always given in particular social contexts, and that discourse analysts need to pay attention to the variability of participants’ discourse, and the particular social functions which this variability might serve.

Instead of assuming that there is only one truly accurate version of participants’ action and belief which can, sooner or later, be pieced together, analysts need to become more sensitive to interpretative variability among participants and to seek to understand why so many different versions of events can be produced (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984/2003, p. 2).

This focus on variability has continued in discourse and rhetoric work in social psychology, especially regarding the variability of people’s attitudes towards social issues. ‘The argumentative nature of holding strong views’ is a case study in rhetorical psychology (Billig, 1989, 1991, chapter 8), as well as an attempt to see how its theoretical principles work in practice. It is part of the Talking of the Royal Family studies, where families were recorded discussing royalty in the
comfort of their own homes and their discourse analysed from a rhetorical perspective (Billig, 1992). Billig criticises the assumptions and practices of traditional attitude theory within social psychology, which often suggests that people hold simple, unvaried attitudes, and that variability of views is confined to cases of people holding weak or unformed attitudes. Work in discourse and rhetoric, however, has shown that attitudes have a pronounced variability, and that individuals express a complicated mixture of positions when they interact. Potter and Wetherell (1987) for example suggest that attitudinal variability is to be expected from a speech act perspective, because people will be performing different conversational actions with their utterances, depending upon the contexts in which they are speaking (see Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Levinson, 1983). Billig suggests, however, that while people may strategically alter their views according to the particular argumentative context of the moment, at the same time, they will be drawing upon a common sense repository of contrary themes. Variability of views is therefore a consequence of both the strategic, rhetorical nature of argumentation, and also the ‘dilemmatic’ quality of common sense and ideologies, provided through culture and history. Billig (1991) shows how this ‘culturally produced variability of views’ (p. 188) is evidenced in the discourse of a man known for his ‘strong views’ about royalty.

The idea that common sense contains contrary themes, as propounded in the traditions of rhetorical psychology and discourse analysis so far reviewed, is a central principle of the ‘ideological dilemmas’ approach (Billig et al., 1988). This approach aims to introduce the concept of ‘ideology’ to the social psychological study of everyday thinking, and in the process critiques how theorists of ideology have conceptualised the term. While cognitive psychologists have tended to overlook the ‘social nature and content’ of thought, theorists of ideology have often ignored ‘the thinking of individuals’ (p. 2). As such, the authors set out to study the ‘thinking society’ by exploring the ways in which ‘ideological dilemmas’ appear in everyday thinking and mundane activities.

Billig and his colleagues propose that ‘many of the conventional images of ideology assume that ideological thinking is non-dilemmatic’ (p. 27). That is, ideological systems are viewed as integrated systems of thinking, and the individual who is subject to ideology is viewed as a blind ‘dupe’ who unthinkingly follows the dictates of the ideology. By contrast, according to the ideological
dilemmas perspective, 'ideology is not reproduced as a closed system for talking about the world. Instead it is reproduced as an incomplete set of contrary themes, which continually give rise to discussion, argumentation and dilemmas' (p. 6). The ideology of liberalism, for example, contains argumentative 'counter-themes' such as democratic egalitarianism and authoritative expertise, equality and inequality, individualism and collectivism, the opposition of which 'enables endless debate and argument' (p. 3). Through their qualitative investigations, Billig and his colleagues found it possible to see the 'reproduction of the great problems of philosophy, and in particular liberal philosophy, in everyday discourse' (p. 6). Ideological traditions came to be 'structured semantically in the vocabulary used in everyday discourse' (p. 41) such that 'the very vocabulary at our disposal expresses conflicting themes' (p. 16). From an ideological dilemmas perspective, then, 'ideology ceases to be seen as an elegant coherent totality but as fragmented and contradictory, with the very stresses and variations within it being crucial to its operation' (Wetherell and Potter, 1992, p. 61).

The ideological thrust of discourse (in maintaining oppressive power relations) depends precisely on contradiction, dilemma and complex multi-faceted positionings of self and other which can be mobilized in multiple rhetorical directions with varying consequences for social relations (Edley and Wetherell, 2001, p. 441).

The ideological dilemmas approach has been informative for discursive social psychologists studying racist and sexist discourse. In Mapping the Language of Racism, for example, Wetherell and Potter (1992) develop an analysis of racist discourse which stresses the importance of studying 'ideological practice and ideological effects' (p. 200). In classical Marxist accounts of ideology, ideological discourse 'obscures or mystifies, conceals or covers over real states of affairs' (p. 18). The classical concept of ideology refers to 'the processes whereby interests of a certain kind become masked, rationalized, naturalized, universalized, legitimated in the name of certain forms of political power' (Eagleton, 1991, p. 202; see also Marx and Engels, 1974). Wetherell and Potter (1992) instead view ideology as 'discursive practice.' Racist discourse is criticised not so much for representing 'inaccurate and misleading representations of reality' (p. 18) but rather for 'establishing, sustaining and reinforcing oppressive power relations' (p. 70). The
analyst is encouraged to situate the discourse they are studying in its cultural and historical context, and analyse the detailed specifics of that discourse, paying particular attention to possible ‘ideological outcomes.’

The main advantage of the concept of ideology, as we see it, is the basic premise that knowledge, talk and texts are bound up with social and material processes, and the emphasis on historical analysis. Ideology ... also has the strongly critical edge necessary for anti-racist practice. To describe someone’s opinions as ideological is to mount a critique of those opinions. This conception of ideology draws attention to processes of legitimation, rationalization and justification, and in this sense discourse is seen as a form of social action (p. 33).

Wetherell and Potter argue that analyses that focus on the ‘falsity’ of ideology, and which point to the ‘truthfulness’ of scientific accounts of reality, may even serve to hinder the investigation of ideological practice. They demonstrate how ‘social reformist, humanitarian and seemingly liberal’ arguments can be used to legitimate racism in modern day society (p. 56), and how biological essentialist arguments might be mobilized for the anti-racist cause.

It does not seem particularly useful, in this context, as in other contexts, to describe particular types of arguments as inherently ideological, that is, as inherently orientated towards the maintenance of unequal power relations (p. 186).

From the perspective of discursive psychology, then, any claims about ideology or dilemmas are to be instantiated in the detailed analysis of discourse. Not knowing the actual content of discourse prior to analysis, the researcher must be attuned to the possible ideological effects of discursive and rhetorical practices, as they are employed in particular social settings. Along with being attuned to what is said, though, the analyst of ideology must also be attuned to what is not said.

[1] If people think about one set of issues or dilemmas, then their attention is removed from other matters, and the effects of ideology might be gauged by what is not a matter for interesting discussion. In analysing ideological discourse, therefore, one should be aware of

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11 Edley and Wetherell (1999) have similarly illustrated how liberal feminist themes can be used to legitimate gender inequality.
the gaps in discourse, or those possible topics of conversation which fail to be mentioned (Billig, 1990, p. 78; emphasis in original; see also Billig, 1997, 1999).

We will return to the question of ideology and variability later in the chapter. When we consider how the ideological dilemmas approach has been applied to the topic of education. Presently, we will consider the extent to which discursive psychology can be considered ‘critical,’ and what a critical discursive take on the issue of ‘identity’ might look like.

Dilemmas of critique and identity

Discursive psychology has often been presented as part of the ‘critical’ movement in social psychology (for recent accounts, see Fox and Prilleltensky, 1997; Hepburn, 2003; Ibanez and Iniguez, 1997). There have been debates, however, about the extent to which discursive psychology is, or should be, critical (see, for example, the collection in Parker, 2002). Gough and McFadden (2001), in their recent introduction to critical social psychology, draw on the perspectives of Marxism, feminism and social constructionism to shed critical light on the traditional topics of social psychology, including the self, social influence, sex differences, sexuality, aggression, and prejudice. The traditional psychological approaches of experimentalism and cognitivism are criticized for promoting individualistic understandings of people, and in their place, the authors argue in favour of qualitative studies of discourse, ideology, and power. They stress that, ‘[i]n terms of data analysis, the popular preference for critical social psychology is discourse analysis’ and make a distinction between ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ approaches (p. 18). The top down approach to discourse analysis, which is influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, is concerned to expose, and challenge, the oppressive discourses of society (e.g. Parker, 1992). The bottom up version, by contrast, is concerned with how people employ rhetorical strategies and conversational devices to perform social actions, and to negotiate particular social and historical dilemmas (e.g. Edwards and Potter, 1992).

Gough and McFadden imply that one cannot be critical if one is taking a ‘bottom up’ approach to discourse analysis. They include no examples of rigorous discourse analyses which pay attention to the detailed specifics of language use.
Indeed, Gough and McFadden’s analyses come close to what Charles Antaki and his colleagues (2002) have termed ‘non-analysis’ because the authors fail to analyse the specifics of the data they present. When the authors give only a short paragraph of analytic comments after a lengthy quotation (Gough and McFadden, 2001, pp. 55 – 58), they are not properly analysing the discourse they present. Rather, they are doing a cursory or superficial kind of analysis. The absence of an introduction to critical discourse analysis, for example, which allows the combination of a critical, political agenda with the detailed study of discourse, is a surprising ‘bottom up’ omission (see Fairclough, 1995, 2001).

The argument of the present thesis is that it is possible to do a kind of discourse analysis which pays attention to the detailed subtleties of language use and which is also ‘critical.’ After all, ‘today the dilemmas of critique are very much the dilemmas of language’ (Billig and Simons, 1994, p. 7). The thesis follows in the footsteps of those discourse analysts who have attempted to combine both critical and analytical agendas (e.g. Billig et al., 1988; Billig, 1992; Fairclough, 1995; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). For example, in a series of publications on masculinity, Edley and Wetherell have attempted to transcend the top-down versus bottom-up dichotomy in discursive social psychology (Edley and Wetherell, 1997, 1999, 2001; Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell and Edley, 1999).

If the problem with post-structuralist analysts is that they rarely focus on actual social interaction, then the problem with conversation analysts is that they rarely raise their eyes from the next turn in the conversation, and, further, this is not an entire conversation or sizeable slice of social life but usually a tiny fragment (Wetherell, 1998, p. 402).

Edley and Wetherell argue in favour of an ‘eclectic’ approach to analysis – which they term ‘critical discursive psychology’ or a ‘two-sided discursive psychology’ – that embraces both the constructive and constructed nature of discourse. Following Barthes (1993) and Billig (1991) they suggest that ‘people are simultaneously the products and the producers of discourse’ (Edley and Wetherell, 1997, p. 206; emphasis in original). Furthermore they argue that discourse analysts need to work with the contradictions of this ‘dilemma of discourse,’ rather than coming down on either side of the dichotomy.
When people speak, their talk reflects not only the local pragmatics of that particular conversational context, but also much broader or more global patterns of collective sense-making and understanding (Wetherell and Edley, 1999, p. 338).

Edley and Wetherell illustrate their approach through an analysis of contemporary masculine identities, focusing specifically on how men manage the 'delicate and sometimes dilemmatic task of juggling between two quite contradictory gender identities or masculine positions' (Edley and Wetherell, 2001, p. 451), namely between a 'traditional' form of masculine identity, and the more modern identity of the 'new man' (Edley and Wetherell, 1997, p. 204). It can be appreciated from these few comments how the discursive position warns against treating identity as an internal state. Tajfel (1981) claimed that identities depend on the use of categories, for a social identity is a form of categorization. As Widdicombe (1998) has pointed out, 'notions of category membership and social identity are crucially linked: a reference to a person’s social identity is also a reference to their membership of a specific category' (pp. 52 – 53). Discursive psychologists take Tajfel’s point further by emphasizing that if categories are part of language, then identities should be considered as discursive constructs. That means that the topic of identity should be studied by examining what people are doing when they make claims about their own and others’ identities.

Edley and Wetherell carry out this form of analysis through a combination of ethnographic methods, focus groups, and interviews with two samples of men, including 17 to 18 year old sixth-form students at an independent boys’ school and a more diverse sample of older men aged 20 to 64. They bring analytic attention not only to the ‘ways in which men are positioned by a ready-made or historically given set of discourses or interpretative repertoires, but also [to] the ways in which these cultural resources are manipulated and exploited within particular rhetorical or micro-political contexts’ (Edley and Wetherell, 1997, p. 206). In their studies of teenage boy common room culture, for example, Edley and Wetherell focus upon the ‘action orientation’ of the particular kinds of ‘identity work’ done by the young men, and how they ‘position themselves in relation to the available interpretative repertoires of masculinity’ (Edley and Wetherell, 1999, p. 183). These positionings often involve the complicated negotiation of ideological dilemmas.
Aaron can be seen to be trying to find a ‘solution’ to a powerful ideological dilemma: he wants to have children and he’d like to be there for them, but he also wants to pursue a career; he wants an egalitarian relationship with his partner, but at the same time he would prefer her to stay at home with the kids (Edley and Wetherell, 1999, p. 186).

Edley and Wetherell (1999) view gender as an ‘ideological battlefield’ (p. 183) in which conflict and contestation abound over the contrary themes of masculinity. Men are neither wholly positioned by discourses, nor free to construct themselves as they please. Rather, a complicated dialectic takes place between the two polar extremes, such that men are seen as both agentive in their actions, as well as determined by their discourses. The present thesis follows work in critical discursive psychology and related work in rhetorical psychology and ideological dilemmas by understanding people as both free and constrained, knowing and not knowing, competent and incompetent (Billig, 1999a). It is not assumed that speakers fashion themselves anew in every social interaction, as might seem to be implied from a conversation analytic perspective. Nor is it assumed that speaking subjects are the effects of the workings of discourse or power, as might be suggested from a post-structuralist stance. Instead, people are understood as actively constructing themselves and their identities against the backdrop of history, and within the context of culture and society. In each social situation there is likely to be both novelty and conventionality, creativity and normality, as people think and argue over their identities and their place in the world, drawing upon a shared stock of common sense knowledge (Bakhtin, 1981; Billig, 1991, 1996; Gramsci, 1971).

Unaware of our ideological and semantic heritage, we can still live within its tradition. In this way the currents of ideological history can quietly pass through our own thinking, in a way which ensures that our thinking is not purely our own (Billig et al., 1988, p. 42).

While the present author is in broad agreement with the tenets of a ‘critical’ or ‘two-sided’ approach to discursive psychology, especially with regard to the recommended analytic ‘eclecticism,’ the present thesis diverges from this work in terms of the particular form of discourse analysis adopted. Wetherell and Edley (1999) point out that they are not concerned with the ‘fine detail’ of the discursive
and rhetorical work evident in the extracts they cite. Rather, their analysis focuses on the ‘broad patterns’ evident in the data file, which are representative of the discourse sample as a whole (p. 339). The present work, by contrast, adopts a more fine grained approach to analysis, and attempts to look in detail at the particular ways in which doctoral postgraduates talk about themselves and their lives. The thesis will not therefore analyse discourse at the level of the ‘interpretative repertoire’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), but rather at the level of the ‘utterance’ (Voloshinov, 1973). It will be argued, for example, that ideological balancing and negotiation can take place within singular utterances, as well as over broader stretches of talk. Thus the analyst needs to maintain a double focus: the wider processes of ideology have to be caught within the observable and hearable detail of talk.

In addition, the forthcoming analytic chapters will show how the interactive or relational dimension of discourse is central to the construction and negotiation of identities. As suggested in the previous chapter, empirical studies of doctoral postgraduate education need to acknowledge the role of the researcher-participant relationship in the constitution of participant accounts. In the classic Texts of Identity, Shotter and Gergen (1989) emphasise the importance of addressing the ways in which personal identities are ‘formed, constrained and delimited within ongoing relationships’ (p. ix; emphasis added). Indeed, from the perspective of social construction, ‘[w]e are born of our relationship and derive our sense of identity from relationship’ (Gergen, 2001, p. 177). The present thesis aims to track the relational process of doctoral identity formation locally, as it occurs in the talk of postgraduates in interaction. As such, the kind of discourse analysis espoused in the present thesis is influenced more by conversation analysis than it is by poststructuralism (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998). From a conversation analytic perspective, ‘identity is something that is used in talk: something that is part and parcel of the routines of everyday life, brought off in the fine detail of everyday interaction’ (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998, p. 1; emphasis in original). Conversation analysts see social identity as a ‘resource deployed in conversational contexts’ and recommend the close inspection of identity claims and their interactional relevance (Antaki, Condor and Levine, 1996, p. 473; see also Antaki, 1994, 1996; Antaki and Horowitz, 2000).
The work of Widdicombe and Wooffitt on youth subcultures is a strand of discursive psychology that combines conversation and discourse analysis of identities (Widdicombe, 1993, 1995, 1998; Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1990). Of especial interest is The Language of Youth Subcultures which is a study of the ‘perceptions, opinions and attitudes’ of the members of subcultural groups, including punks, skinheads, gothics, and rockers (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995, p. 25). The authors’ aim is to address subcultural members’ own accounts of their existence, rather than relying on the assumptions of New Subcultural Theory about what members and their activities are like. To achieve this, Widdicombe and Wooffitt interviewed members of subcultures about their affiliations, the way in which they considered themselves, and how they came to join their particular subcultures. The authors pay particular attention to ‘the practical business of identity work which is accomplished through verbal interaction’ (p. 89) and the way in which ‘identity is woven into the fabric of social interaction’ (p. 76).

Adopting a fine grained conversation analytic approach, Widdicombe and Wooffitt look in detail at the openings of interviews, and in particular the ways in which the interviewer asks questions of the respondents, such as ‘do you consider yourself a punk?’ The authors argue that ‘the back-and-forth flow of interaction between interviewer and respondents constitutes the basis of joint activity through which identities are produced (and resisted)’ (pp. 89 – 90).

By examining the subtle procedures through which identities are occasioned, resisted, and negotiated in interaction we begin to appreciate social identities as utterly fluid, variable and context-specific. This is partly because the very meaning, content and form of identities are made contextually relevant to address contingent interpersonal concerns (p. 108).

As well as being interested in the local interactional contingencies of identity work, Widdicombe and Wooffitt are also concerned with the ‘ideological dilemmas’ of being a member of a youth subculture, although they do not actually use this term. The interview participants were found to negotiate various dilemmas associated with liberal ideology and the contrary themes of ‘individuality’ and ‘collectivism.’ For example, Widdicombe and Wooffitt note
how the participants in their study often ‘resisted’ affiliating with a subcultural identity at the beginning of their interview – even though they looked as though they were punks, skinheads, or gothics – only later going on to construct their ‘authenticity’ as a subcultural member. The authors explain this pattern of initial resistance by bringing attention to the paradoxical idea that members of youth subcultures are expected to be ‘non-conformist.’ While a person who is a ‘punk’ is not supposed to conform, at the same time they are a member of the ‘punk’ subcultural grouping, which implies (or demands) some level of conformity.

‘[C]ollective identity implies a loss of individuality and consequently implicates self-inauthenticity’ (p. 205). The participants negotiated this dilemma by first resisting subcultural affiliation, and then subsequently constructing their authenticity, so that their individuality was not entirely compromised through affiliation with the collectivity. ‘[B]y constructing the enduring nature of their interests, speakers imply that their status as members of subcultures is a simple expression of an intrinsic self-identity, and thereby indicates their authenticity’ (pp. 144 – 145).

Wetherell implied above that while conversation analysts gain from looking in detail at the organisation of social interaction, they also lose out by not placing their data into a wider social and historical context. Conversation analysis can still be recruited for the purposes of social critique, however, for as Widdicombe (1995) has argued, ‘it is precisely in the mundane contexts of interaction that institutional power is exercised, social inequalities are experienced, and resistance accomplished’ (p. 111). ‘[F]ar from being an obstacle to understanding the political significance of identities, a detailed analysis of talk shows the site where power and resistance are played out’ (p. 123). The present discursive approach to doctoral education combines a focus on interviewing as a social practice with an interest in patterns of tension and conflict inherent in postgraduate identity work. The focus is upon the way in which doctoral students come to negotiate wider ideological themes in specific social encounters and how they employ a variety of rhetorical strategies and conversational devices in their constructions of identity.

12 In a later publication ‘resistance’ becomes ‘warranting non-membership’ or ‘doing non-membership’ (Widdicombe, 1998, p. 52).
Dilemmas of education and power

In this final substantive section of the chapter we will briefly review work in discourse analysis on the ideological dilemmas of education, specifically relating to the workings of power in higher educational contexts. The aim is to sketch out some of the themes that discourse researchers have found in their studies of education, especially relating to the dilemmas of liberalism identified in the earlier section on ideological dilemmas. As might be predicted from a dilemmas perspective, researchers have found evidence of contrary themes in education, and that these themes are related to inequality and power. However, what is clear from a discursive perspective is that power relations cannot be assumed prior to analysis. The changing nature of power dynamics in contemporary social life means that we must be sensitive to the workings of power in our actual analyses, rather than presuming the straightforward existence of power beforehand. Thus the present section attunes us to the possible patternings of discursive power at work in educational settings, but does not rigidly prescribe the forms this power might take in modern day postgraduate education.

In an early discourse study, Edwards and Mercer (1987) carried out ‘educational language research’ within mainstream junior schools in England. They video-recorded and analysed classroom lessons involving 8 to 10 year old children and teachers working according to a ‘progressive’ or ‘child-centred’ model of teaching. One of the central tenets of the progressive model is that pupils are expected to ‘learn for themselves’ by making independent educational discoveries. The model stresses the importance of learning by doing: ‘learning through activity and experience rather than from didactic instruction’ (p. 7). The teacher is merely to act as a facilitator, assisting pupils on their ‘voyage of discovery.’ In this respect, the progressive classroom appears to be democratic or egalitarian in nature. However, Edwards and Mercer were ‘surprised at the extent to which the relatively ‘progressive’ sorts of teaching that [they] examined were characterized by the overwhelming dominance of the teacher over all that was done, said and understood to be correct’ (p. 2). In practice, they found that the progressive teachers who took part in their study did not act according to ‘democratic’ principles alone. Rather, they attempted to negotiate a balance between the contrary themes of ‘democracy’ and ‘authoritarianism.’ The teachers
were, for example, posed with the dilemma of ‘how, in an essentially discovery-oriented sort of classroom education, do pupils manage to discover what they are meant to?’ (p. 101). Edwards and Mercer found that teachers resorted to ‘less overt means of maintaining discursive control over the establishment of common understandings’ (p. 126), using what the authors termed ‘cued elicitation’ (p. 110). Essentially ‘the teacher asks questions whilst simultaneously providing heavy clues to the information required’ (p. 142). While the teachers gave the impression that their pupils were ‘learning for themselves,’ at the same time they would subtly guide and control what their students were learning, such that their educational ‘discoveries’ conformed to pre-determined educational curricula.

‘[T]he freedom of pupils to introduce their own ideas was largely illusory; the teacher retained strict control over what was said and done, what decisions were reached, and what interpretations were put upon experience’ (p. 156). Thus, the ideology of progressive teaching was found to be dilemmatic, being composed of contrary themes and demands. The progressive teachers negotiated these themes as they taught and as they attempted to describe their teaching in conversational interviews. Edwards and Mercer concluded that ‘education is necessarily ideological and predicated upon social relations in which power and control figure largely’ (p. 161).

The power dynamics of higher education appear less straightforward than those of junior school education, as Norman Fairclough (1993, 1994, 1995, Chapter 6, 1996) has illustrated in his work within critical discourse analysis on the marketization of contemporary British universities. Fairclough highlights how ‘advertising and promotional discourse have colonized many new domains of life in contemporary societies’ (Fairclough, 1993, p. 139), including the university sector. Through a text-based analysis of press advertisements for academic posts, programme materials for an academic conference, an academic curriculum vitae, and entries in undergraduate prospectuses (p. 145), Fairclough brings attention to a ‘widespread contemporary ambivalence: is this information, or is it promotion?’ (pp. 150 – 151). For example, ‘the written text [of the contemporary undergraduate prospectus] is designed to persuade while appearing to be merely informative’ (Fairclough, 1996, p. 80). Thus, ‘in terms of professional identities, [undergraduate prospectuses] show academics trying to reconcile being academics and being salespeople’ (p. 78).
Promotional material addresses readerships as consumers or clients, and when someone is selling to a client, the client is positioned as having authority. This is generally true in advertising. It is in contradiction with the traditional authority of the university over applicants/students, and it places the institution in something of a dilemma, for it will obviously still wish to impose requirements and conditions upon entry, course structure and assessment (Fairclough, 1993, p. 157).

Fairclough analyses how this ‘dilemma of authority’ is practically negotiated within written university prospectuses. In addition, he suggests that the colonization of discourse by promotion may have ‘major pathological effects’ upon people, as well as ‘major ethical implications’ (Fairclough, 1993, p. 142). Given that we are all constantly subjected to promotional discourse, and that information is so widely covert promotion (Fairclough, 1994, p. 257), a problem of trust is said to occur. ‘[H]ow can we be sure what’s authentic? How for example, do we know when friendly conversational talk is not just simulated for instrumental effect?’ (Fairclough, 1993, p. 142). Indeed, Fairclough (1993) suggests that ‘self-promotion is becoming part-and-parcel of self-identity ... in contemporary societies’ (p. 142) and that it is ‘perhaps becoming a routine, naturalized strand of various academic activities, and of academic identities’ (p. 153). He proposes that particular self-identity shifts have recently occurred within organizations, including the ‘reconstruction of professional identities of academics on a more entrepreneurial (self-promotional) basis, with the foregrounding of personal qualities’ (p. 157).

What Fairclough falls short of doing is substantiating his claims through an analysis of the everyday talk of academics and students. Benwell and Stokoe’s (2002) work on undergraduate tutorials, however, seems to point to some of the changes of authority that Fairclough has identified. They have studied resistance towards academic and intellectual identities and the negotiation of power amongst students and tutors in university seminar sessions. They found that undergraduate students ‘displayed discursively their reluctance to engage in discussion activities and a resistance towards academic or intellectual identities’ (p. 429). For example, some students treated their tutorial task as ‘rather pointless but having to be done, instrumentally rather than for any educational worth it may have as a collaborative activity’ (p. 444). ‘[P]ositive evaluations of their tasks ... as well as other displays
of enthusiasm for their activities, were routinely ironized, ignored or challenged in
the students' talk' (p. 444). Benwell and Stokoe conclude that ‘[i]n the current
social climate ... it appears that doing ‘being a student’ involves displaying
ambivalence, a lack of enthusiasm and ironic distance from ‘doing education’” (p.
446). It will be interesting to see if such displays are evidenced in the talk of
doctoral postgraduate students, in relation to their identities and activities.

The Colloquium studies by Karen Tracy and her graduate student colleagues
in the United States comprise some of the most relevant work to the present thesis
(Tracy and Baratz, 1993; Tracy and Carjuzaä, 1993; Tracy and Muller, 1994;
Tracy and Naughton, 1994; Tracy, 1997). They have applied the concept of
ideological dilemmas to the study of intellectual discussion seminars, involving
academic faculty members and graduate students in the field of communication
studies. ‘Drawing upon tape-recorded colloquia, interviews with colloquium
participants, and several other kinds of materials [they] describe the web of
problems academic groups face, the discursive practices used, and the ideals
academics have about how they should talk’ (Tracy, 1997, p. 4). Their central
argument is that ‘the academic colloquium is best conceived as a dilemmatic
situation – a communicative occasion involving tensions and contradiction’ (p. 4),
and describe many of the dilemmas experienced by colloquium participants. In
communication studies, they propose, ‘being suitably intellectual is constituted by
managing tensions – between being committed to practice and being interested in
theory, between being methodologically systematic and pursuing rich data,
between linguistic articulateness and interactional naturalness’ (p. 49). For
example, ‘while people wanted to be seen as smart, they [also] wanted to avoid
appearing as if they were concerned about displaying their intellectual prowess’
(p. 28). In the words of discursive psychologists these discussion participants were
caught in a dilemma of ‘stake and interest,’ attempting to ‘produce accounts which
attend to interests without being undermined as interested’ (Edwards and Potter,

Tracy and her colleagues have analyzed how intellectual discussion
participants balance the contrary themes of ‘equality’ and ‘expertise’ in their
presentations (Tracy and Carjuzaä, 1993; Tracy and Muller, 1994; Tracy, 1997,
Chapter 6). They point out that while discussants are expected to evaluate ideas
according to their own merits, the institutional inequality of the university and the
differing status positions of 'graduate student' and 'faculty member' – which connote differences in expertise, experience, and accomplishments – mean that it is neither possible nor desirable to treat everyone’s ideas equally.

Participants thought they were expected to respond to ideas on their merit alone. At the same time, they thought they should take account of the experience level of the person to whom they were making a comment (Tracy, 1997, p. 84).

This ideological patterning has been described elsewhere in discourse analysis as an 'unequal egalitarianism' or a 'non-authoritarian authoritarianism' whereby the democratic ideals of society come into conflict with the authority of expertise given to modern day experts (Wetherell, Stiven and Potter, 1987; Billig et al., 1988, Chapter 5; see also Edley and Wetherell, 1999). As explained in Ideological Dilemmas,

In a strictly stratified society, in which the charisma of authority can be recognized for its own sake, the dilemma does not arise: authorities can behave in an uninhibitedly authoritarian way. However, in a society imbued with democratic norms, the position of an authority is not so straightforward. The norms of democracy are fundamentally egalitarian. They suggest that each person is to be respected as having opinions valuable enough to have an equal say in the destiny of the country (Billig et al., 1988, p. 65).

'While the concept of 'expertise' seems to resolve the dilemma between equality and authority ... modern day relations between experts, and between experts and non-experts, are characterised by ambivalence rather than by ... egalitarianism' (ibid., pp. 66 – 67). In the Colloquium studies Tracy found interesting differences between doctoral students and established academics in their accounts of the importance and mutability of rank and power. These patterns seem to capture well the image of the liberal expert who, as a 'hunched-shouldered authority,' must disguise their power in the context of a seemingly democratic society.

[T]hose of higher rank thought the advantages of rank could be minimized more easily than those of lower rank (Tracy, 1997, p. 81).

Faculty members underestimate the role of their power; graduate students overestimate the contribution of power differences (Tracy, 1997, p. 146).
Tracy proposes that inequality is ‘not only necessary, but a desirable feature of academic settings’ because those with more status and power – such as professors – often have more ‘knowledge, experience, and skill’ than those with less status and power – such as students (pp. 82 – 83). Tracy appears to be speaking from her own position of power here, for her argument does not allow for the fact that inequality can potentially lead to abuse of power. Studies of postgraduate education therefore need to be cautious of propounding the necessity and desirability of inequality in academic settings, giving careful attention to any differences in accounts of power between university staff and their students. After all,

[I]t is in the very nature of the phenomenology of power that those at the centre who have it experience its workings the least. In their world, opportunities open themselves up before them; to have power is to find no resistance to the realization of one’s desires. The kind of power of interest to us is not power at the centre, but that at work between centre and margins. It is those without power who find at every turn resistances to the realization of their desires (Shotter, 1993b, p. 40; emphasis in original).
Epilogue

In an effort to cheer myself up, I spent the morning reading about reflexivity (Fictitious PhD student, cited in Ashmore, Myers and Potter, 1995, p. 339)

In the chapter ‘Discourse, Rhetoric, Reflexivity’ of the Handbook of Science and Technology Studies, Ashmore, Myers and Potter (1995) write a reflexive ‘new literary forms’ account of doing a literature review at postgraduate level. The chapter presents the diary of a female PhD student, spending ‘seven days in the library’ trying to find themselves ‘a new research topic’ (p. 324). Over this period the student reviews various fields of study, all in the general area of science studies.

I never want to see another gerbil sand bathing again. I think I may give up on my dissertation; what really interests me now is not the behavior of rodents but the behavior of the psychologists and zoologists studying them. Specifically, what does this dissertation contribute to knowledge? What does a study like this do for me or anyone else? Why does it have to be written in that strange style and form? (p. 323).

The student justifies writing their review in the form of a diary by pointing to the problematic division in science writing between ‘form’ and ‘content.’ ‘It is not just a matter of how it is put; the it is mixed up with the putting,’ and as such it is better to ‘show the mutual constitution of form and content’ than it is to say it (p. 322; emphasis in original). Essentially it is better to do reflexivity than it is to write about doing it.

As part of her argument the doctoral student proposes that ‘reviewing’ is an interesting object of study in itself, and can be taken apart and analysed as an academic activity, and as a form of literary presentation.

Reviews ... are a particularly interesting and underanalyzed genre. As far as I can see, the only way to write a review, while at the same time attempting an analytic treatment of “the review,” is to use a form that is “self-commenting” (p. 322).

This particular suggestion has a direct implication for the present research study: a doctorate on doing a doctorate ought to include a running reflexive self-
commentary, bringing attention to its own status as a ‘PhD thesis’ and as a site for doctoral knowledge production. The present literature review should, for example, employ ‘experimental textual forms’ in order to parody its status as a ‘literature review,’ thereby allowing new questions to be asked and new avenues of inquiry to be pursued.

All week, the most interesting things I have read are those that foreground their authors’ own involvement in the text. And it seems that the closer one’s topic is to one’s method, the more important it becomes to devise some way of coming to terms with the implications of that similarity (p. 339; emphasis in original).

This approach has been developed most fully by Malcolm Ashmore in The Reflexive Thesis (1989), which is a study in, and on, reflexivity within the sociology of scientific knowledge. It is an exercise in ‘celebratory practical reflexive inquiry’ which aims to move beyond the idea that reflexivity is something problematic and to be avoided. ‘[B]y showing and displaying and talking around its own socially constituted nature, its own textuality and its own paradox, instead of always and only talking of these things, it can talk of other things’ (p. 110; emphasis in original). Using a variety of literary forms, including the lecture, the encyclopedia, and the dialogue, Ashmore demonstrates the play between ‘thesis-as-argument and thesis-as-an-occasioned-academic-product’ (Woolgar, 1989, p. xix).

The functions of this chapter include displaying the author’s scholarly erudition, displaying the width and depth of the author’s reading, acting as a general introduction to the main topic of the thesis, acting as a series of specific introductions to the reflexive claims made by those SSK participants discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters, acting as a series of substitute analyses of the reflexive claims of those SSK participants not discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters (Ashmore, 1989, p. 47; emphasis in original).

Reflexivity has the potential to open up new lines of enquiry in the study of doctoral research, and indeed to reveal things in postgraduate education that might otherwise remain hidden. The doctoral student in ‘Discourse, Rhetoric, Reflexivity,’ for example, was concerned to show how the task of reviewing is ‘riddled with accident, serendipity, and loss’ and how the ‘appearance of
coherence and order that is the achievement of the text is built on extremely shifting sands.’ ‘One prominent strategy I use is to point up certain noticeable absences in normal review discourse by foregrounding their presence in my text’ (p. 322).

In the following chapter, we will adopt this reflexive strategy, exploring the dilemmas of doing and writing doctoral research methodology, in which the paradoxes of revealing and concealing ‘error’ are practically managed. What we will find, however, is that not everything is made visible through a reflexive analysis. In going reflexive, one may still be leaving absences, and accomplishing avoidances. For example, while the student in the above chapter attempted to situate herself ‘in space and time, in networks of relationships’ (p. 322), there is no mention of a supervisor. Given that the initial responsibility of a supervisor is to negotiate with the student the actual nature of their thesis topic, this absence is somewhat conspicuous. Of course, the student in ‘Discourse, Rhetoric, Reflexivity’ is fictionalised, being the creation of the academic authors of the chapter itself, who themselves were and are doctoral supervisors. As such, she is not intended to be taken as a ‘real’ PhD student, but rather as a mere ‘fiction.’ It might be more accurate to describe her as a ‘fantasy,’ however, for she seems to resemble an ‘idealised’ student, the kind of student that Ashmore, Myers and Potter might like to supervise.

Independence, perseverance, enthusiastic curiosity, and an energetic and systematic application to the work in hand were all frequently recurring components of supervisors’ typifications of the good student (Hill, Acker and Black, 1994, p. 66).

In a similar way to how the doctoral self-help guides often ‘idealise’ the doctoral research process, Ashmore, Myers and Potter imagine the ‘ideal’ doctoral student who, crucially, has no supervisor. It is in this sense that ‘fiction’ cannot so easily be separated from ‘fact’ in reflexive writing. It also appears that there is no approach or strategy in reflexive work – whether ‘traditional’ or ‘experimental’ – that can guarantee a particular outcome, such as revealing what is hidden, or bringing to the surface patterns of unacknowledged inequality and power. As such the present thesis will be presented mostly in ‘the time-honoured monologic format’ (Ashmore, 1989, p. 73).
Chapter 4 – Dilemmas of Method and Reflexivity

Within qualitative, discursive and critical approaches to psychology it is generally acknowledged that methodological issues cannot be separated from theoretical assumptions. When one employs a particular method one is always drawing upon and consolidating ideas about how the world works, what people are like, and so on (see Richardson, 1996a; Edwards and Potter, 1992; Henriques et al., 1984). In contrast to this, the methods sections of traditional psychological reports are often presented as purely descriptive accounts of ‘what happened.’ They often involve little theoretical discussion of methodological issues, implying that the practice of psychology can be separated from theory, interpretation and argument. From a discursive perspective, the methods one employs are inherently bound up with theory. The choice of how to investigate a given topic is intimately connected with epistemological and ontological issues relating to the very nature of that topic as a ‘topic.’ As such, the present chapter constitutes both a presentation of ‘what happened’ in this study, as well as a discussion of the particular issues surrounding method in discursive psychology and in studies of doctoral education. Each section will include descriptive details of how the study was developed and conducted, as well as a discussion of the associated theoretical issues. The aim is not to provide an exhaustive and complete account of the various methodological issues relating to the topics under discussion, but rather to highlight some of the central issues involved in adopting a discursive approach to the study of doctoral education, and to show how the presentation and practice of ‘method’ is inherently bound up with theoretical assumptions. It is hoped that these discussions will contribute both to studies of higher education and debates on method within discursive and related constructionist approaches to psychology.

It is not lost on the author that many reflexive issues arise when one is studying a topic which is ‘close to home.’ The way in which one studies a topic has the tendency to constitute that topic and this is especially the case when one is doing a doctorate on the dilemmas of doing a doctorate (Ashmore, 1989). Writing a PhD thesis can itself involve negotiating ‘doctoral dilemmas’ and the present study is no exception. Rather than avoiding these issues and treating them as problematic, however, a better strategy seems to be to draw attention to the
paradoxes and make them a part of the study itself. As such this chapter will attempt to reflexively illustrate some of the most central issues arising from studying what one is studying. We will find that methods themselves can become objects for analysis and topics for creative discussion. Crucially the relationship between the researcher, the topic, and the participants becomes central. A reflexive approach is deemed to be entirely appropriate in this context because the present researcher's object of study is the same as his way into that topic. As such, even the doctoral theses as a written document can become a focus of investigation and experimentation. ¹³

Participants and their selection

Naturally the participants in this study were doctoral students and young lecturers registered as PhD candidates and in the process of either carrying out or completing their doctoral theses, or waiting for their viva voce examinations. Between March 2001 and January 2002 a total of 16 participants were interviewed, comprising 12 female and 4 male doctoral postgraduates in various psychology and social science departments at universities in the North West and East Midlands of the United Kingdom. Participants were selected from a variety of institutional locations, including 'new' and 'old' universities, as well as colleges associated with universities. The ages of the participants ranged from 24 to 40 years. (Brief biographical details for individual participants can be found in Appendix A.) Ethical issues relating to the discursive presentation and anonymisation of the respondents in the study are discussed in the section 'Ethical Considerations' below. The present section will discuss the characteristics of the

¹³ It is important at this point to raise the issue of authorial voice and how this chapter, this thesis, and indeed this footnote, are written. The standard choice as it is experienced in qualitative psychology is between adopting the impersonal and objective voice of the social scientist, or the personal voice of the researcher as an individual person. For the present chapter it was decided that the impersonal and the personal voice would both be used, depending upon what was being written at the time. The author flits between writing about what 'I did' and what 'was done' in the various different sections. This is mainly because I am both the researcher and a participant in this study. As we shall see, I was interviewed as if I were a participant, and in the interviews I am not solely...
participants, their selection, and general issues relating to the presentation and engagement with 'participants' in discursive psychology.\textsuperscript{14}

The sampling method used in this study was opportunistic in the sense that the participants were found in a non-systematic and somewhat haphazard fashion. The aim was not to acquire a representative sample from a population of PhD students and therefore the term 'sampling' is perhaps not entirely appropriate. In much discursive psychology 'discourse' is the object of study rather than individual 'people' per se (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). In the present study no attempt was made to standardise or control the selection of participants as in traditional questionnaire or experimental studies. Attempts to contact prospective participants were mainly made through friends and colleagues studying or working within the academy. As such the selection of participants has particular biases in it. The most obvious of these is that 75\% of the participants were female. Of course this proportion of males and females is unlikely to reflect the overall gender split in psychology and social science doctoral students. For example, in 2002 and 2003, the ESRC received applications for their Research Studentship Competition and 55\% of the candidates were women and 45\% men (ESRC, 2004).

While this study does not seek to comment on gender differences between PhD students, it might nevertheless be the case that there are certain experiences which are specific to female as opposed to male members of the academy (the salary levels of academic staff is an example, see Ward, 2001a, 2001b). However, in accordance with conversation analytic and ethnomethodological approaches to gender, it is suggested that gender should only become an issue for analysis when it is demonstrably made relevant by the participants in their talk (e.g. Stokoe and Smithson, 2001). If gender 'creeps into talk' then it will be taken up as an issue

\textsuperscript{14} The reader may notice that in Appendix A the researcher himself is listed as participant number 13. This is because he was interviewed by one of the other participants at the end of their interview. Few social research studies seem to include the researcher themselves as a participant in their studies. Indeed, the present researcher's own interview is not analysed in this thesis. It is worth thinking through the issues surrounding why this might be the case. In studies employing discourse analysis it would be important to consider whether there is a reluctance to subject ones' own talk to close linguistic analysis, and if so, why this might be the case.
for analytic discussion (see chapter 7). However, if no such ‘orientations’ take place, then it is generally assumed that there are more similarities than differences between doctoral students of different genders. Of course this assumption of equality between genders is a contentious point, and therefore it is important to keep in mind the differences in gender of the doctoral students in this study. The reader is left to make their own judgements about matters arising from gender based upon the discursive data that is presented.

On a similar point there are also definite disciplinary biases in the sample in that 63% (10/16) of participants are in psychology departments. While there are no natural science doctoral students in the sample, there is one humanities student. Of course this reflects my own disciplinary training in psychology, which in turn determined who I contacted to find respondents. As Delamont, Atkinson and Parry (2000) have shown, there are important disciplinary differences in how doctoral students are socialised, and as such it is important to keep in mind the disciplinary affiliations of the doctoral students in this study. However, as I am not studying knowledge production per se, this is not assumed to constitute a major problem for the investigation. I am not so concerned with the ways in which doctoral students learn their topics of study and become socialised as particular kinds of knowledgeable subjects, but rather with more general issues relating to academic identity and the dynamics of the supervisory relationship. It is presumed that while there may be differences in doctoral experiences between social science disciplines, there are also likely to be important similarities.

Furthermore it is problematic from a discursive perspective to assume that disciplinary identity is a background feature of what the respondents say about their experiences. As in the approach to gender adopted, disciplinary differences should only become an issue if they are demonstrated as such by the participants in their talk, or possibly if the researcher, through their scholarly or experiential knowledge of the subject matter, suspects that disciplinary differences might be playing a role at any given moment (Billig, 1988). Taking this discursive approach to disciplinarity and gender differences raises the broader issue of ‘context’ within qualitative social research. To what degree do we need to look ‘beyond’ the words of our participants to understand their activities? The present thesis does not aim to review or weigh in on the debates about context but rather to flag up points which are important to the discursive study of doctoral education (for more
general discussions of context in discourse and conversation analysis, see the special issue of *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 1998, Volume 31, Issue 1).

Overall it is somewhat difficult to talk about the selection of participants in a discursive study of this kind, partly because of the influence of conversation analysis, in which mention is rarely made of how one’s data was acquired, or how one’s participants were recruited. Even the term ‘participant’ has different meanings in social psychological research as compared with conversation analytic work. In the former, a participant is someone who ‘participates’ in the research. In the latter, a participant is ‘partaking’ in a conversational interaction; they are a ‘member’ of the social world (see Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998). In social psychological studies the methodology section should outline precisely how the respondents were recruited and what they were told about the research, partly to enable ‘replication’ of the study to take place. In conversation analysis, however, the only ‘replication’ likely to take place is of the analysis itself, hence the focus upon standardising transcription conventions (see below). Little or no mention is made of where the ‘data’ has come from and how it acquired its status as ‘data.’ This is partly to give the sense that the materials under analysis are objects in themselves (cf. Ashmore, MacMillan and Brown, 2004). However, when the ‘data’ consists of individual people and what they say, this raises subtle but important ethical issues about how we present and relate to our ‘participants,’ which we will briefly discuss below.

In discursive studies influenced by both conversation analysis and social constructionism there appears to be a tension between showing your data to be constructed and as an artefact of the process of research on the one hand, and naturalising your data such that it becomes part of the social world rather than an academic creation on the other. The present study prefers to open up the research process for inspection, and to ask questions which are sometimes difficult for researchers, especially junior researchers, to address. Of course this process of revealing can also itself perform a hiding (Billig, 1999a), as we shall see as the chapter and the thesis progresses.

The first way in which I selected my participants was to ask fellow doctoral students studying at the same university as myself to take part in practice or ‘pilot’ interviews. Two of these interviews were carried out. The fact that these
participants were known to me made it easier to contact them and arrange appropriate interview times. Furthermore, the actual process of interviewing was made easier because of the relative informality of our relationships (although this was not always the case, see chapter 8). The particular questions asked of the respondents in both the pilot and proper interviews will be discussed in the section on interviewing below.

Following these initial encounters, attempts were then made to contact cohorts of doctoral students through more senior academic members of staff who were known to me in other universities. In the first attempt to find respondents external to my own institution, emails were forwarded to PhD students in particular departments, requesting participation in my research study. Senior academic contacts were asked to introduce myself and my project, giving a sense of official permissability to my research, and then I sent the following email to the doctoral postgraduates in the department, personalising as appropriate. Names have been changed to protect the identities of those mentioned.

Figure I: Email which was distributed to potential participants

Dear Tony

I hope that Malcolm Lawson has contacted you, regarding my PhD research into the experience of social science doctoral students.

I am emailing to ask if we could do an informal interview? I am interested in your experiences as a doctoral student, what it's like for you to do your research, and so forth.

I am based at Loughborough. If you would like to help me with my work, then we could arrange where you would prefer to meet. Maybe I could come to Placename, if this is the best for you?

Warmest regards

Steven.
This email represents a shift from the initial ‘internal’ pilot interviews to ‘external’ interviews of an informal nature. My own development as a doctoral student, from relatively cautious forays in my own department, to early attempts at contacting external respondents who were unknown to me, can be observed. In the email in Figure I, I set up the agenda of my study and make relevant particular ideas about my project and what I am expecting of my respondents. The request for an ‘informal’ interview is important because it establishes the kind of study which is to be done. This is not going to be a ‘formal’ interview for a job, but rather a more relaxed occasion. In this email we can not only detect subtle themes relating to what kind of research is being done, but also to the assumed relationship between the researcher and his participants. By mentioning ‘my PhD research’ I explicitly display my identity as a postgraduate student doing a doctorate. This has the potential to perform particular interactional tasks in terms of my relationship with the participants. Firstly, it situates the research as a particular kind of research. It is personal or individual research (‘my’) and not research carried out by a team of researchers (such as the kind of study reviewed in chapter 2). Secondly, it locates myself as potentially ‘on a par’ with my respondents. They are positioned in the same category of people as myself, ‘social science doctoral students.’ So emails such as this do not play a neutral role in the social research process. Rather they set the agenda of the study and display assumptions about what is required of the participants. As such they can be analysed as part of the research process itself, not as somehow prior to or separate from it.

Emails like the one presented in Figure I were sent to doctoral postgraduates in institutions where senior academics known to myself were working. Then in December 2001 I sent a letter to PhD students registered in a Department of Psychology which was previously unknown to me. I contacted the administrator responsible for postgraduate research studies and asked whether they would be willing to distribute a letter to the students through their internal pigeon hole system. This request was accepted. In the letter I introduced myself and my research, and requested participants for my study (see Appendix B). This letter displays another shift in my own development as a researcher. Compared with the email presented in Figure I it is more professional and official in its character and
tone, possibly because it is ‘cold calling’ doctoral students who are unaware of my research. There is much which could be said about this letter, and so I will limit myself to one observation about professionalism. The use of the Loughborough University logo in the top right hand corner works to credential myself as a figure with official authorisation, as does the mentioning of my PhD being sponsored by the ESRC. The overall impression of the letter is that of a professional researcher who is capable of doing research in a competent manner. This being the last request for participants it appears as though I have become capable of carrying out research appropriately and professionally.

We will now turn to consider the interviews which were carried out with doctoral students, as well as assumptions about interviewing as a social practice. When we consider the actual interview schedules which were used by the researcher in the field, we shall see that tensions between experience and inexperience, competence and incompetence, continue to be played out and negotiated.

**Interviewing as an academic activity**

Interviewing is a standard research methodology in the social sciences, especially in qualitative work, where it is often assumed that a good way of gaining access to a person’s experiences or beliefs is simply to go out and ask them (see Kvale, 1996). Researchers rarely question the use of interviewing as a method of data collection, however, and as such certain important issues are often neglected. There are particular assumptions built into the theory and practice of interviewing which we might want to take issue with from the perspective of discursive psychology. In much qualitative work interviews are treated as ‘routes’ through which one can gain access to other phenomena external to the interviews themselves, such as ‘attitudes,’ ‘experiences,’ or ‘reality.’ When participants are

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15 As well as carrying out interviews, 56 advertisements for social science PhD studentships were collected from the Guardian newspaper over the period of one year. These were to be studied to see how doctoral student life and identities are constructed in public university documentation, thereby making links between discursive psychology and work in critical discourse analysis on the marketisation of higher education (see Fairclough, 1992; Owen, 2004). However, these are not analysed in the present thesis.
asked to talk about their lives their talk is then treated as illustrating ‘what they do’ or ‘what they think’ in a universal and context-free fashion. Participants in interview studies are often expected to speak about their inner lives or the social world from a ‘God’s eye point of view,’ outside of the particular contexts in which they ordinarily live their lives, speak and argue. As Potter (2002) has pointed out, interview talk tends to be flooded with psychological assumptions and terminology, which social researchers tend to treat as evidence of more general psychological processes existing within individual interviewees.

In general, the theory and practice of interviewing often assumes that language works as a representational system for depicting the world or the mind, rather than working actively as a social practice for the performance of actions. However, the presumption that each person has straightforward access to their inner thoughts, beliefs and memories is problematic because it neglects the thoroughly social and discursive character of these phenomena (see chapter 3). Recent work in discourse and conversation analysis, however, has started to understand interviewing as a social activity and as a practice in its own right. Interviewers and interviewees are understood as ‘doing interviews’ and their talk is analysed as such (see Van den Berg, Wetherell and Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2003). In this section I want to justify why interviewing has been chosen as an appropriate method of data collection in the present study, outline the interviewing procedure, and how we can understand the interviews from a discursive perspective.

It is important to address why I have decided to interview doctoral postgraduates rather than say record everyday talk between doctoral students and members of staff in seminars, at social events, or in supervision meetings, for example. Doctoral supervision itself is a very private academic practice in the sense that it has only recently come under scrutiny by researchers and quality assurance agencies (see Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 1997b, 2004; Li, 2000). Delamont, Parry and Atkinson (1998) point out that the ‘social science research on doctoral candidates and supervision has never included prolonged and systematic observation of supervision actually happening ... Researchers have relied on students’ and supervisors’ accounts of the relationship and the processes’ (p. 158). This study is no exception in the sense that it involves interviewing doctoral students, sometimes about their experiences of supervision, rather than actually
observing the supervisory relationship itself. Given the time limits involved in writing a doctoral thesis it was believed to be important to get access to data in as quick and straightforward a manner as possible. This is especially the case when one is learning the craft of discourse analysis, where it is important to begin writing as soon as possible (although guides on how to do discourse analysis rarely mention the subject). Negotiating access to supervision meetings is likely to have taken longer than requesting interview participation from doctoral students, and therefore might have delayed the thesis progress.

Within the context of the present study it is important to stress that interviewing is a central part of contemporary academic research practice. Many academic researchers and doctoral postgraduates employ interviewing as their data collection method of choice. Therefore to study interviewing is to study an academic practice. It is to study a particular genre of ‘institutional talk’ (McHoul and Rapley, 2001) or the negotiation of ‘elite identities’ (van Dijk, 1993). In the present context, it involves studying the social activity of doing a social psychological doctorate, in a practical, empirical and reflexive manner. We will literally be getting a glimpse of what is involved in carrying out semi-structured doctoral interviews at PhD level. As such, this study follows critical work within psychology which studies interviewing as a form of social practice situated within particular social contexts (see, for example, Wetherell, 2003). The interviews are treated as collaborative interactional encounters in which wider personal and cultural themes are negotiated and managed. Although interviews are not supervisory situations, the interviewing practices in the present study are dependent upon prior and continuing supervisory situations, in which the participants and the present researcher participated, in their capacities as doctoral postgraduates.

At the beginning of the first year of my PhD I carried out two pilot interviews with fellow PhD students, who were studying at the same university as myself. The first pilot interview was carried out in a restaurant on the Loughborough University campus and included questions on the doctoral student’s thesis, as well as their views on publishing. (Part of this interview is analysed in chapter 8). After this first interview my agenda was then expanded and improved to encompass a wider variety of issues relating to doctoral student
life. The second pilot interview was carried out in my office and began by mentioning ethical issues and the aims of my project. This was then followed by questions on the doctoral student’s thesis progress and their experiences of writing. As the interview went on we talked about prior expectations of doing a PhD, experiences of publishing, and whether they considered themselves to be an academic.

These initial pilot interviews served several different functions. Firstly, they allowed me to practice interviewing. Although I had used the method of interviewing for my first degree, I did not have much experience of carrying out in-depth interview discussions. In this sense the first few interviews served as useful practices, as I gradually changed my interviewing style. It should be noted, however, that this ‘improvement’ in my capability as an interviewer did not necessary equate with ‘improved’ data. When I carried out my first interview I was relatively inexperienced and tended to ask awkward questions of my participant. This generated some interesting data (see chapter 8). However, as I became more experienced, my subsequent interviews tended to be somewhat less interesting. Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest that interviewers might want to challenge their interviewees, thereby allowing them to employ a variety of discursive devices in their talk. What they do not discuss however is that, by employing such an interviewing style, the interviewer themselves risks coming across as inexperienced or inept. They risk presenting themselves as something other than ‘dispassionate’ social researchers in search of the objective ‘truth’ of events. Doctoral students, as part of their academic development, are expected to be competent and professional in their encounters with their respondents. If they

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16 Subsequent interviews were carried out in postgraduates’ offices, vacant university seminar rooms, university cafeterias, a cafe, one university hall of residence, and also on the telephone.

17 For example, in their Code of Conduct for Psychologists, The British Psychological Society (2000) propose that ‘[p]sychologists shall endeavour to maintain and develop their professional competence, to recognise and work within its limits, and to identify and ameliorate factors which restrict it’ (p. 2; cf. Foster, 2003). Similarly, the British Sociological Association (2002), in their Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association, recommend that ‘[w]hile recognising that training and skill are necessary to the conduct of social research, members should themselves recognise the boundaries of their professional competence. They should not accept work of a kind they are not qualified to carry out’ (p. 2). I imagine this latter stipulation could prove somewhat difficult for doctoral sociologists to abide by.
are to be seen as representatives of their home institution, or of academia more
generally, then they may not wish to come across as incompetent or pushy. As
such, Potter and Wetherell's suggestion might not be so helpful for fledgling
qualitative researchers in the field. Unless, that is, they wish to generate
interesting data.

The second function of the initial pilot interviews was to find out whether I
was going to get interesting and substantial data from my participants. Qualitative
research can be a risky business in the sense that you literally do not know what
you're going to get before going out into 'the field.' You are not sure whether
your interests will be reflected in what your participants say. As it turned out the
doctoral students I interviewed often spoke at length about the various issues,
experiences and dilemmas they were negotiating in their lives. They generally
seemed to appreciate the opportunity to speak openly about their dilemmas in the
presence of a fellow student. Indeed, this was mentioned in the letter of
introduction sent out to potential doctoral student participants (Appendix B).

Thirdly and finally the pilot interviews were helpful in developing interview
schedules for the interviews subsequently carried out with doctoral postgraduates
at institutions other than my own (see Appendices C, D and E). These schedules
were used to guide the interview conversations. They acted as memory aids
whenever I was 'lost for words' and helped to give a general structure to each of
the interviews. Several topics of discussion are commonly raised across the
interview schedules, including ethics, requests for background information from
the participants, their current doctoral research (including their sense of freedom
and constraint), whether they considered themselves to be academics, and their
experiences of publishing.

Although the schedules include complete questions for the interviewees to
answer, it was not the aim of the interviewing procedure to read these out
verbatim. Throughout the interviews I adopted an in-depth semi-structured or
'conversational' interviewing style. The general aim was to encourage the
respondents to speak personally and at length about their lives as doctoral
students, while at the same time covering the issues which I was interested in as a
researcher. There was a constant balance to be struck therefore between what was

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18 Some participants appreciated this more than others, see chapter 7.
interesting to me and what was interesting to them, and as such the interviewer-interviewee relationship veered between impersonality and rapport. As Platt (1981) notes, ‘the recognized tension between the demands of impersonality and of rapport from the interviewer implies a preparedness to exploit divergent understandings, since the interviewer is meant to be objectively impersonal in her approach, while using rapport to elicit information which might not be provided under purely impersonal conditions’ (p. 84).

The reader will notice that the interview schedules were expanded and refined over the course of time. Several interesting observations could be made about these schedules, although they were not intended for public viewing. They give an interesting insight into the development of the present research, and indeed of the present researcher. One insight relates to the issue of professional competence, which was raised in the earlier discussion of participant selection. Changes in researcher competence can be observed across the three interview schedules. The first schedule (Appendix C) was typed on a typewriter using a piece of paper taken from a notepad. It was used for an interview with a doctoral postgraduate at an institution where I knew one of the senior faculty members. This was one of the earlier interviews and as such the schedule is not very well presented. It appears messy, incomplete and not very professional. In contrast, schedule number two (Appendix D) was printed using a computer, whereby mistakes could be removed at the word processing stage. In this schedule the interview was in the process of being split into various sections; questions are starting to be grouped together in certain ways. In the third schedule (Appendix E), this division is made more clear; the agenda is divided into ‘Beginning,’ ‘Middle and ‘End.’

The development of these interview schedules gives a potential insight into what could be considered the ‘professional socialisation’ of myself as a doctoral student, moving from the position of inexperienced amateur to that of competent practitioner. However, the acquisition of professional competence is unlikely to be as straightforward as this progression would imply. For the necessity of professional presentation places doctoral students in a potential dilemma. In learning how to present both themselves and their research in a capable and proper manner, student inexperience and incompetence must be repressed or at least avoided, both from presentation and from practice. A completed doctoral thesis
should, for example, be devoid of incompetence; mistakes and incompetencies ought to be discarded or concealed, and the final finished product should reflect a perfectly professional presentation of self (Phillips and Pugh, 2000). With such rigid proscriptions regarding presentation and conduct, there is likely be a temptation to loosen the professional restraint, and present oneself in a non-professional manner (Billig, 1999a). What is repressed has the tendency to return, and therefore it is unlikely that even fully fledged academic professionals will be completely lacking in amateurish characteristics (see the top of Interview Schedule III, Appendix E). We will continue to consider ideas about the revealing and concealing of researcher incompetence in the following section on ethics.

**Ethical considerations**

Ethical issues are important to consider in any empirical social study which involves human or animal participants (BPS, 2000). Ethical guidelines provide codes of conduct with regards how researchers should relate with their participants. Although ethical guidelines are often written with the protection of participants in mind, ethical codes also work to protect researchers. Indeed, there is a sense in which it would be deemed ‘unethical’ not to recognise and incorporate ethical considerations into the design and implementation of one’s research. As such, it has become customary to acknowledge ethical issues in social research, and the reporting of ethics has therefore taken on something of a banal character. Ethics tend to be acknowledged in a routine manner, devoid of critical questioning or reflexive awareness.

There is also something disingenuous about the reporting of ethics in psychological research, related to the tendency to routinely present oneself as being ethically ‘in the right.’ While superficially protecting participants, ethical discussions often work defensively to present researchers in a purely positive moral light. As such there is rarely a mention of those occasions where the researcher has been ethically ‘in the wrong.’ In doctoral research, however, things can and do ‘go wrong’ (Delamont and Atkinson, 2001). Doctoral research

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19 Even the presentation of my own incompetence as a researcher is itself a display of professionalism, as I am demonstrating ‘transparency’ in my research practice (see, for example,
therefore provides a potentially good case study in the contravention of ethical guidelines, and how this relates to the practice and reporting of ethics in social research more broadly. Briefly, in this section we will consider attempts to protect the participants in the present study, some accidental unethical practice during a telephone interview, and the dilemmas involved in interviewing one’s peers.

The main ethical consideration of relevance to the present study is 'confidentiality.' In research reports it is customary to anonymise one’s participants by giving them pseudonyms and disguising their personal details so that they cannot be identified by readers or reviewers. In their 'Ethical principles for conducting research with human participants' The British Psychological Society explains that 'Participants in psychological research have a right to expect that information they provide will be treated confidentially and, if published, will not be identifiable as theirs' (BPS, 2000, p. 10). There are several reasons why confidentiality is important in the present study. Firstly, the respondents are in the same social sphere as those who are likely to read or assess the present piece of work. Secondly, there is a specific disciplinary focus on psychology and social science departments. And thirdly, PhD topics tend to be specific and idiosyncratic and therefore authors might easily be identified. Naturally the respondents in the present study talked about being doctoral students in their own particular university departments. They also often discussed their relationships with their supervisors. As such, there is a possibility that the real identities of the participants might be discovered, either through their institutional locations, or their doctoral thesis topics. How were the respondents to be identified (or, more accurately, not identified) in the present study?

In their study of doctoral study, Delamont, Atkinson and Parry (2000) go to great lengths to anonymise their participants, giving senior academics and postgraduate research students a variety of elaborate pseudonyms and fictitious institutional locations, as well as systematically varying institutional and disciplinary affiliations (see Delamont, 2003). In the present study, efforts were made to ensure the partial anonymity of the respondents. While each participant was given a false first name and identified as such, their actual age, status and departmental location were preserved. Unlike Delamont, Atkinson and Parry the Appendix C).
present researcher is not so concerned with doctoral knowledge production and therefore little mention is made of the actual topics of respondents’ theses. When mention is made, details of thesis topic or research orientation are disguised or altered so as not to identify the student or supervisor in question. Similarly the institutional locations of participants are not given. University names are either blanked out or replaced with the words ‘Institution’ or ‘Placename.’ As such, all participants were guaranteed enough anonymity and confidentiality so that their real identities could not be ascertained.

Not all of the participants in the study were concerned to be anonymised though. Participant number five (see Appendix A), for example, gave me permission not to anonymise him. When asked via email how much anonymity, if any, he would like, he replied ‘I can’t actually remember what I said in the interview, but as long as I said nothing pro Bush or Blair you can mention me by name! [sic]’ This participant is therefore identified by his real name and none of the details about his research or supervisor have been altered or concealed (see chapter 8). We will consider in more detail how ethical issues were practically negotiated in the research at the end of this section.

The next important ethical issue to consider is the protection of the participants. ‘Investigators have a primary responsibility to protect participants from physical and mental harm during the investigation’ (BPS, 2000, p. 10). In the present study attempts were made to ensure the mental and physical well-being of all the respondents. For example, interviewees were never asked to talk about their relationships with their supervisors, as it was felt that this was a sensitive issue which might have caused some discomfort to speak about, especially if the doctoral student in question was having a ‘rough time’ of it. Also it was made clear to the respondents that I was not assessing the quality of their work or of the supervision they were receiving. Nor was I checking up on their thesis progress. In general it was assumed that the topics likely to be raised in the interviews were unlikely to cause participants any significant degree of mental harm. Indeed, the opposite seemed to be the case, as ‘[s]everal of my respondents ... appreciated being given the opportunity to speak in confidence about their lives as doctoral students’ (Letter of Introduction, Appendix B). In particular this was borne out in the case of one participant who had had a particularly bad experience of doing her
doctorate. Anna explicitly said she appreciated the opportunity to talk about what had happened to her (see chapter 8 for her story).

All of the participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. If, as the interview progressed, the participant was uncomfortable with what had been asked or the direction in which the interview was going, then they could just say so and I would turn off the recorder and stop the interview. (‘At the onset of the investigation investigators should make plain to participants their right to withdraw from the research at any time, irrespective of whether or not payment or other inducement has been offered,’ BPS, 2000, p. 10).

Finally we need to consider the issue of ‘consent’ and the instance of unethical practice in the study. ‘Whenever possible, the investigator should inform all participants of the objectives of the investigation’ (BPS, 2000, p. 8). Naturally all of the participants knew that they were participating in a social research study on the topic of doctoral education (see ‘Participants and their selection’ above). However, the researcher was not able give much more detail than this, because of the indeterminacy of the project at the time of data collection. As in much qualitative research, especially ethnographic and discursive work, the precise nature of the study could not be known from the outset. Rather it developed inductively over time as the researcher became acquainted with the materials and the topic. Participants were aware that they were partaking in a qualitative study in which their words would be presented verbatim, and consent was obtained from them to do this at the beginning of each interview.

That is, in all but one case. During the one telephone interview in the study, the respondent was *not* informed of the relevant ethical issues relating to the conduct of the study at the beginning of the interview. Not only this, after around twenty minutes into their interview, the participant *themselves* raised particular ethical issues for clarification, which the researcher then went on to address. It is worth presenting transcribed versions of these ethical exchanges, if only to demonstrate how (un)ethical practice can become a ‘live’ concern in social research. Ethics are not merely abstract methodological issues, driven by guidelines and codes of conduct. Rather they are practical concerns, handled and negotiated in various ways by researchers and participants as investigations proceed. By looking at occasions when ethics ‘become relevant’ in research
studies we can begin to understand the practical role that ethics can play in the business of ‘doing research.’ Thus we can begin to treat ethical practice as a fruitful topic of study as well as a methodological issue.

In the following exchange – after discussing a sensitive issue relating to the funding of her PhD – the participant ‘Louise’ asks for clarification about an ethical issue (see Appendix F for the transcription notation used):

**Extract 1**

Louise can I just clarify this will be entirely anonymous won’t it?
Steven absolutely yeah I was gonna go on to do my statement when it was (. ) well (. ) when it was convenient but yeah I mean I’m guaranteeing you complete anonymity and confidentiality I won’t specify-
Louise I was assuming that yeah
Steven I won’t be identifying the institution or anything and I’ll be making as much effort as I can to anonymise everyone

In this instance it is the participant who raises an ethical issue rather than the researcher.20 Ironically this in itself could be cited as evidence of unethical practice, as Steven appears to have neglected his ethical duty to inform the participant about the ethical procedures of his study, including provisions for anonymity and confidentiality. Louise should not need to ‘clarify’ whether she will be ‘entirely anonymous’ in the research or not, as Steven himself should have addressed the issue earlier in the conversation. An important feature of this exchange is the way in which Steven not only answers Louise’s question, but also explains or justifies himself, saying that he was ‘gonna go on to do’ his ethical statement when it was convenient. It is only then that he gives his statement, guaranteeing Louise ‘complete anonymity and confidentiality.’ Steven thereby defends what could be considered incompetence with regards his ethical practice

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20 It is important to stress that Louise did not just ask her question ‘out of the blue’ without any prior occasioning. It was only after talking about a sensitive issue relating to the funding of her PhD that she raised the issue of anonymity. Thus, ethics are not merely abstract issues for theoretical consideration, but can become practically occasioned during research encounters themselves, and negotiated and managed by both researchers and participants.
by claiming that he was ‘going’ to inform Louise about confidentiality, thereby suggesting that he had not forgotten or intentionally disregarded the ethical considerations of his study.

Thankfully as ‘Louise’ is a pseudonym Steven appears to have stood by his promise of anonymity. However, the ethical dilemmas do not end here, for soon after this exchange Louise asks a second question, this time relating to the issue of consent. This question places Steven in an even more compromising position with regards ethics.21

Extract 2

Louise by the way are you taping this conversation?
Steven yes I am I was going to also ask you if it was okay to do that
Louise right
Steven is that okay with you?
Louise oh yeah yeah yeah I was kind of assuming that
Steven right right I was gonna mention that whenever it became relevant
Louise it’s not a bad idea to let people know at the beginning
Steven right okay sorry about that Louise

The possibility that one might be ‘covertly recording’ one’s participants is potentially more ethically reprehensible than not promising them anonymity and confidentiality. It goes against ingrained assumptions in social research about ‘informed consent’ and possibly evokes broader cultural fears around ‘phone tapping’ or ‘being bugged.’ In general a researcher who records their participants without permission risks being considered morally suspect. Indeed it is possible that Steven himself is aware of this issue and its seriousness, because he justifies himself not once but twice in the present extract. Steven does not immediately

21 It can be noted that both of the questions that Louise asks are prefaced (she says ‘can I just clarify ...’ and ‘by the way ...’) rather than asked directly, which gives the impression either that the questions themselves are enquiring into sensitive areas and therefore in need of softening, or possibly that the very act of questioning in this context is counter normative. After all, these are the only questions the interviewee asked of the interviewer during the conversation, which might account for their prefatory hedging.
apologise to Louise, saying that he ‘forgot,’ for example. Instead, he says that he was ‘going’ to ask Louise if it was ‘okay to do that’ and that he was ‘gonna mention that’ whenever it became ‘relevant.’\(^{22}\) Again it is taken for granted that Steven should have asked Louise for permission to record the interview, and that not doing so constitutes some kind of breach or infringement of good and proper research practice, such as that outlined in an ethical code of conduct. In a similar way to how, in Extract 1, Steven guaranteed Louise anonymity and confidentiality when it was raised by her as an issue, in Extract 2, after justifying his potentially unethical practice, Steven asks Louise whether it is ‘okay’ to tape the conversation, which Louise then assents to, saying ‘oh yeah yeah yeah I was kind of assuming that.’

In their paper on participant orientations to recording devices, Speer and Hutchby (2003a; see also Hammersley, 2003; Speer and Hutchby, 2003b) suggest that ‘[b]y exploring how tape-affected speech becomes a participant’s topic, we are able to delve further into the situated ways in which research ethics and the morality of recording are played out as participants’ concerns’ (p. 321). Indeed it would be worth following up analytically how ethics are practically managed in research materials and encounters.\(^{23}\) Speer and Hutchby do not discuss in detail the issue of ethics in their paper, concentrating as they do more on methodological issues surrounding what counts as ‘natural’ or ‘contrived’ data (see also the debate in Discourse Studies, 2002, Volume 4, Number 4). Indeed they do not consider cases where the ‘recordee’ asks the ‘recorder’ whether their talk is being taped, thereby implicating the researcher in potentially dubious ethical practice. The fact

\(^{22}\) It is interesting that Steven uses the conversation analytic notion of ‘relevance’ as a methodological strategy for informing his participant that their talk is being recorded. Might he be suggesting that the fact that a participant is being recorded should only become relevant when it is raised as an issue by the participant themselves, rather than being imposed by the researcher before hand?

\(^{23}\) Ethical issues are explicitly mentioned in each of the interview schedules presented in Appendices C, D and E. Reference to ethics becomes increasingly specific as the schedule is modified, from the adhoc handwritten ‘ethics’ (Appendix C), to an imprecise reminder to ‘say a few words about ethics’ (Appendix D), to the more specific identification of three ethical considerations, ‘[a]nonymity, confidentiality and withdrawal’ (Appendix E). This development in the specificity of ethics in the schedules might partly be a result of the ‘bad’ telephone interview experience. Not surprisingly, all of the remaining interviews were carried out face-to-face.
that this is a telephone interview means that Louise would not necessarily have known whether she was being recorded or not, had she not asked Steven about it, and had he not told her. Louise appears to be correcting an absence related to the mentioning of potentially relevant research activities, including the habitual recording of interviews, and the customary obtaining of ‘informed consent’ from participants to do so. Louise informs Steven that ‘it’s not a bad idea to let people know at the beginning’ of the interview that they are being recorded, thereby instructing him in the proper practice of ethics, and indirectly ‘telling him off’ for getting it wrong. It is only then that Steven apologises to her.

Why did Steven the interviewer justify himself in the way that he did in both of the extracts? Why did Louise the interviewee need clarification on information which she says she was already ‘assuming’ would be the case? And indeed why did Steven the researcher find these extracts so difficult to listen to and transcribe? Such questions lead us beyond the scope of the present section, and indeed beyond the scope of the thesis as a whole. One observation can be made, however, about the double prohibitive nature of ethics. Not only is there an especially strong prohibition against unethical activity in the practice of research, but there also seems to be a prohibition against presenting oneself as unethical in the writing of one’s report. I was personally very reluctant to use extracts from Louise’s interview in my thesis, finding them difficult to transcribe and listen to. Indeed I was tempted to avoid her interview altogether and forget that it had ever happened.24 When thinking back to the emotional pain that was involved in listening to and transcribing extracts one and two – possibly evoking feelings of shame and embarrassment (Scheff and Retzinger, 1991, 2000) – it is easy to understand why researchers tend to routinely show themselves as being ethically ‘in the right’ in their studies. Ironically one would expect ‘transparency’ in research to be the ‘right thing to do’ ethically (cf. Gill, 1995). However, in presenting their ethical failings, researchers risk presenting themselves as incompetent and unprofessional in their dealings with participants. It is much easier to avoid or ‘skip over’ ethically dubious practices, either by not mentioning

24 Louise as a participant was very nearly ‘repressed’ from the thesis as a whole; it was only after starting this section on ethics that I was reminded of her existence and decided to add her to
them, or giving banal and sanitised versions of what might otherwise appear to be 'good ethical practice.'

**Transcription**

The audio of each interview was recorded using a Minidisc recorder and lapel microphone. The main benefit of using digital as opposed to analogue recordings of interviews is that audio from a Minidisc is of a much higher quality than that from an ordinary analogue cassette tape. Good sound quality is important for the present research as the interest is not only with what the participants say but also with how they say it. Also the process of transcription is speeded up using a Minidisc because of the instant and reliable access which digital recording equipment affords. The interviews could be listened to repeatedly without fear of wear and tear of the disc itself, and textual transcripts could be produced relatively quickly compared to transcribing from a cassette tape with moving parts.

Initial transcripts were made of all the interviews with doctoral students, at first recording only the words which were said by the interviewer and the respondents. These early verbatim transcripts were organised around topics and themes going across the interviews, such as doctoral postgraduate identity work, descriptions of the supervisory relationship, and stories of publishing from doctoral theses. When, after repeated reading, particular extracts were chosen for detailed discursive analysis, they were then retranscribed using a simplified and modified version of the notation developed by Jefferson (1984a) for conversation analysis (see Appendix F). This system captured not only what doctoral students said about their identities and experiences, but also how they said it. The system includes notation to represent the paralinguistic features of spoken interaction, such as emphasis, repair, pauses, and so forth. The Jefferson system is appropriate for a discursive approach which treats talk as a thoroughly interactional phenomenon, bound up with the performance of social actions (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; see also Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998; ten Have, 1998).

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Appendix A. She is missing as a participant in Stanley and Billig (2004), who claim to have carried out '15 in-depth discussions with 11 female and 4 male doctoral students' (p. 162).
Of course the present study is not merely interested in the interactional organisation of the interview encounters with doctoral students. The main interest is with the ways in which doctoral students describe themselves and their lives. As such, the interest is more with content rather than form (although we cannot assume that these are entirely distinct, see Ashmore, 1989; Ashmore, Myers and Potter, 1995). This focus is reflected in the transcription notation used, which attempts to strike a balance between presenting what was said along with how it was said. While preserving details of the interactional organisation and prosodic ‘delivery’ of the talk, at the same time attempts are made to display the overall ‘narrative’ or ‘discursive patterning’ of particular turns at talk. This is closely allied with the concern to maintain the readability of the transcripts. Often the respondents spoke clearly and lucidly about their lives and it was hoped that the transcripts would reflect this. The approach to transcription should become clearer as the analysis progresses (see especially chapter 7; for a similar version to the one used in the present study, along with a brief discussion on the theory of transcription, see the appendix of Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

It was pointed out in the previous section that there are important ethical issues relating to how one presents and relates with one’s participants. For example, the participants in the present study have been partially anonymised and are identified using false first names. Indeed, there is an ethical dimension to the process of transcription in terms of the identification of the participants in the data extracts. By referring to the participants using first names particular assumptions are being made about the relationship between the researcher and the respondents, as well as the status of the respondents themselves. For example, by referring to the interviewer as ‘Steven’ and the interviewee as ‘Louise’ in the extracts in the previous section, equal status and speaking rights were assumed. It was taken for granted that the speakers were on friendly and equal terms and that there was no imbalance of power between them. Equally it was suggested that no social or role identities were of relevance in their particular encounter. Of course this is plainly not the case, because in this example, and indeed in all of the encounters in the present study, the speakers are playing out the roles of ‘interviewer/interviewee’ and also of ‘doctoral postgraduates.’ Why then identify the researcher and participants using first names rather than ‘discourse roles’ (such as ‘Interviewer’
and ‘Interviewee A’) or indeed ‘institutional roles’ (for example ‘Doctoral Student A’ and ‘Doctoral Student B’)?

The main reason for being on first name terms with the participants is so as not to give the impression that the respondents are interchangeable, and that the talk of one participant could simply be replaced with the talk of another. As we shall see in the following final section on analysis, attempts were made in the thesis to give a ‘populated’ vision of doctoral student life, preserving the distinctiveness of individual participants and their lives. Referring to them as just plain ‘interviewees,’ ‘doctoral postgraduates’ or indeed letters or numbers might have given the impression that there is nothing special about the participants as individual people, or that they can be characterised purely by the roles and statuses which they were adopting at the time. Furthermore, it is expected that first name codes of address would be followed when doctoral postgraduates meet with one another. For example, in the introductory email potential participants were addressed through their first names (see Figure I above).

Of course there are also disadvantages to referring to the respondents by first names, including the idea that their status as ‘interviewees’ is not at all relevant to the analysis. The section on interviewing above made it clear that the respondents are understood as partaking in interview encounters, and that this in turn has an important constitutive role in how their discourse should be understood. Indeed, as part of this orientation my own discourse as ‘interviewer’ is to be analysed along with the responses of the respondents, and the participants’ discourse is contextualised with reference to the interviewer’s turns. Taking into account as well that I took on the role of an interviewee, there is ample evidence to suggest that I am both a researcher and participant in this study. More profoundly, I am the doctoral student writing this thesis and analysing the data. My identification as ‘Steven’ therefore works to bring attention to such paradoxes rather than disguising them by presenting myself as ‘the interviewer’ (for a more extended debate on these and related issues in discourse and conversation analysis, see *Discourse and Society*, Volume 10, Number 4).
Discourse analysis procedure

In chapter 3 we outlined what a discursive view of doctoral education might look like, describing the central assumptions of discursive and rhetorical approaches to identity, ideology and power, and how these might be applied to the study of doctoral student life. In that chapter we set out the theoretical and analytical background to the kind of discourse analysis which is carried out in subsequent chapters. As such, the present section will only lightly prepare the ground for the forthcoming analyses, briefly considering the specific discourse analytic procedure adopted in the present study. We have already considered how the interviews are to be approached discursively, and therefore the present section will necessarily be short.

There is currently a preponderance of guides on how to do, and not do, discourse analysis (see, for example, Wood and Kroger, 2000; Phillips and Jørgensen, 2002; Antaki et al., 2002). Often these guides stress that doing analysis is not like following a rigid procedure or set of rules, but is a more indeterminate and eclectic exercise. As Potter and Wetherell (1987) point out, ‘[a]nalysis of discourse is like riding a bicycle compared to conducting experiments or analysing survey data which resemble baking cakes from a recipe. There is no mechanical procedure for producing findings from a transcript’ (p. 168). Indeed, doing discourse analysis appears to resemble traditional scholarship more than it does social scientific practice. In the chapter ‘Methodology and scholarship in understanding ideological explanation’ Michael Billig (1988) recommends adopting the methods of traditional scholarship in social research. He suggests that the ‘approach of the traditional scholar can be considered anti-methodological, in that hunches and specialist knowledge are more important than formally defined procedures’ (p. 199), especially when one is studying ideology. The present discursive study of doctoral education represents traditional scholarship in the sense that it involves drawing upon academic knowledge and experience in a reflexive, idiosyncratic and somewhat eclectic manner.

The discourse analysis in the present thesis differs from much work in discursive psychology, however, because it focuses on a selection of individual doctoral students. Over the course of three empirical chapters a selection of ‘case studies’ are to be reported, merging the lives of singular students with shared
discursive and cultural themes (see chapters 6, 7 and 8). The thesis is concerned to give a ‘populated’ view of doctoral study, along the lines of previous work in the sociology of education, where individual doctoral students and their experiences are presented and analysed in the text, rather than obscured through the use of survey or questionnaire methodologies. Billig (1994, 1998; see also the commentaries by Spears, 1994; Ussher, 1994; Stringer, 1994) has argued that much written experimental social psychology relies upon a ‘depopulated’ form of rhetoric. Stories of experiments are often told in such a way that they are abstracted from the events that actually took place in the laboratory. Participants are devoid of everydayness and thereby discursively ‘dehumanized.’ Indeed, a similar pattern of depopulation can be found in more fashionable theoretical and analytical work in which individual people and their lives tend not to appear (Stanley, 2001a, 2001b). Even in discursive and conversation analytic work the distinctiveness of individual identities can often be obscured through an overriding emphasis on ‘discourse’ or ‘talk.’ The present analysis adopts a kind of ‘discursive case study’ approach, in which the accounts of individual participants are supplemented and contextualised through biographical details taken from their interviews as a whole. While there is often substantial overlap between participants in terms of the discursive strategies they employ, and the turns of phrase they use, there is also uniqueness in the sense that what each person says is novel, having never been said before (Bakhtin, 1981). The analysis reflects this tension between conventionality and novelty in the participants’ accounts by balancing the ‘personal’ with the ‘social’ (Hepburn, 2003).

Given the eclectic nature of discourse analytic practice, it is difficult, if not impossible, to articulate the precise method which was used to carry out the forthcoming discourse analyses. This is because no systematic ‘method’ was used at all. Rather, the researcher pursued analytic intuitions and hunches, taking up themes and patterns across the materials in an idiosyncratic way, therefore resembling a traditional ‘scholar’ more than an up-to-date ‘methodologist.’ However this account of the research process gives the impression that the present researcher acted alone, and without the aid of collaborators. Indeed the guides on how to do discourse analysis tend to neglect the relational or collaborative nature of intellectual work. Authors of methods articles and textbooks tend not to mention the ‘distributed’ character of academic practice. They often write as
though academics think and act alone and in isolation from their peers, thereby perpetuating the myth of the ‘independent scholar’ (Lee and Williams, 1999; Johnson, Lee and Green, 2000; on the myriad consequences of this kind of orientation, see Shotter, 1997).

This absence in the methodological literature is especially problematic when we come to consider the case of doctoral study, in which students often work with supervisors, who take on the role of intellectual guides or mentors. In a rare mentioning of this issue in a handbook of qualitative research methods, Richardson (1996b) stresses that ‘the significance of an effective and sensitive supervisor-student relationship cannot be emphasized too strongly in the conduct of qualitative research’ (p. 10). For doctoral students learning to do discourse analysis, or indeed any qualitative approach, the role of the supervisor and a wider intellectual community is essential. They are developing a craft skill and as such are in need of help and assistance from more experienced teachers and colleagues.

The conventions of academic writing, however, tend to hide the collaborative nature of analysis and scholarship. For example, while collaborative doctoral publications will often display the names of both student and supervisor (Stanley and Billig, 2004), the spines of bound doctoral theses tend to only display lone student names (Stanley, 2004). As such, the writing practices of academics and postgraduates themselves tend to reinforce the ‘lone scholar’ myth. This myth is accompanied by a general neglect of the topic of ‘writing’ in the social sciences, even in qualitative methods textbooks. For example, in the case of discourse analysis, an emphasis on ‘reading’ is made, but not ‘writing.’ In his paper on methodology, Billig (1988) suggests that ‘the scholar knows that the task of scholarship cannot be reduced to getting through a list of set reading. It is not, for example, merely a matter of ploughing through the collected works of Enoch Powell, in the belief that all necessary reading then will have been completed. Wider reading is also required’ (p. 214). Similarly, in their attempt to convey the discourse analytic process, Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest that ‘there is a basic lesson that is inescapable: analysis involves a lot of careful reading and rereading’ (p. 168). What both neglect to point out is that scholarship and analysis
necessarily require writing and rewriting. And crucially, in the case of doctoral study, in collaboration with a supervisor (or supervisors).\textsuperscript{25}

If all goes well, learning to do discourse analysis at doctoral level can be rather like being an apprentice, studying under an experienced craftsperson. However, the issue of the training of young discourse analysts, and indeed of critical scholars in general, is rarely addressed in the literature. It is possible that such ideas threaten the ‘originality’ of doctoral theses; the ‘independence’ of doctoral students as autonomous academics; and indeed wider assumptions around ‘critical’ intellectuals being separated off from mainstream academic economies and practices. If doctoral postgraduates can be ‘trained up’ in discursive and critical approaches, set free to ‘disseminate’ the work of their supervisors and tutors, and in turn ‘publicise’ their mentors as intellectual figures, then surely this represents a challenge to cherished notions about the purity and preciousness of scholarship and intellectual endeavour? As we shall see as the analysis progresses, the traditional assumptions of academia can sometimes come into conflict with contemporary ‘marketised’ realities, and the socialisation of doctoral students can become intertwined with broader power relations and institutional concerns, which are sometimes difficult for both academics and students to acknowledge.

\textsuperscript{25} We will consider the role of writing and authorship in the doing of a doctorate in chapter 8. On the writing strategies of academics and social science research students more generally, see Lowenthal and Wason (1977), Hartley and Knapper (1984), Hartley and Branthwaite (1989) and Torrance, Thomas and Robinson (1992, 1994).
Chapter Five – Content Analysis of Postgraduate Identity Work

This chapter presents a content analysis of the corpus of interviews carried out with PhD students on their experiences of doing doctorates. It reports a content analysis of qualitative interview transcripts (Kracauer, 1952-1953; Schutz, 1958-1959). Traditionally, content analysis has been a methodology used in communication research. It is ‘a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication’ (Berelson, 1952, p. 18). It has been used within social psychology to analyse participant responses to open-ended questionnaire items and semi-structured interview questions. Hayes (2000) explains that ‘content analysis consists of setting up a series of categories and counting up how many examples of each category can be identified in the data’ (p. 275). In this chapter we will not be carrying out a traditional content analysis by testing hypotheses through statistics. This is because both the sample size and epistemological bases of the study precludes such analysis. Instead, we will attempt to illustrate some of the identity work done by doctoral students in response to a particular question concerning their academic identities.

Content analysis has been criticised from the perspective of discursive psychology for decontextualising the categories it attempts to study (see Edwards and Potter, 1992, pp. 5 – 6; Wetherell and Potter, 1992, p. 93). Potter and Wetherell (1987) argue that it is a method ‘more suited to research where the discourse is understood primarily as an indicator of something lying beyond’ (p. 41). Furthermore, Wood and Kroger (2000) suggest that ‘discourse analysis and content analysis are two very different species’ (pp. 32 – 33). However, it is proposed in the present chapter that discourse analysts might actually benefit from including content analytic style summaries in their work, as a prelude to more detailed and sensitive analyses. This can act as the first step in a discourse analysis, establishing patterns and themes running across the data corpus, and indicating frequencies of occurrence, commonalities and divergences. A ‘linguistically-oriented’ content analysis can be performed, sensitive to the particular language used by interviewer and respondents, and therefore similar to that of a discourse analysis (Shamir, Ziskind and Blum-Kulka, 1999).
Asking the academic question

It is not usual for social researchers to study the questions they ask of their participants, respondent answers generally comprising the exclusive focus of study. Thus the role of researchers in practically setting the agenda of their studies is often neglected. In this section we will look at how the interviewer in the present study ‘probes’ his respondents by asking a particular question of them. It will be suggested that a ‘systematic examination of the language of survey [and interview] questions can provide a useful context for the analysis of the answers’ (Shamir, Ziskind and Blum-Kulka, 1999, p. 354; see also Van den Berg, Wetherell and Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2003).

Out of the 15 respondents who took part in this study, 12 were asked ‘the academic question.’ According to the interview schedule in Appendix E, this question is phrased ‘Do you consider yourself an academic?’ However, the normal semi-structured interview procedure was not to read questions from the schedule verbatim. As a result of this conversational interviewing style, there was a certain amount of variability in how the questions were asked. We will presently investigate how ‘the academic question’ was asked across the interviews. Table I presents the various different ways in which the interviewer asked this question. The analysis will consider some of the common assumptions displayed in the asking of the following questions, before going on to consider participants’ responses to them.
Table I: Variations on the academic question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type I</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  Do you consider yourself an academic?</td>
<td>Anna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Do you consider yourself an academic would you say?</td>
<td>Samantha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Do you consider yourself an academic wd- would you say?</td>
<td>Fiona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Do you consider yourself an academic in in any way?</td>
<td>Wendy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  I wonder if you could just reflect on your identity as a research student and I wonder if you consider yourself an academic in any way?</td>
<td>Punya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  So would you consider yourself an academic?</td>
<td>Will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  Would you consider yourself an academic in any sense?</td>
<td>Ben</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  I mn would you consider yourself an academic at all?</td>
<td>Cathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  Do you feel like an academic?</td>
<td>Sandy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type II</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 Do you feel yourself becoming an academic or you think you already are one or?</td>
<td>Rachel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Do you consider yourself an academic at the moment?</td>
<td>Yoko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Do you think you aspire to be an academic like?</td>
<td>Hanako</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis will consider some of the general features of the asking of the academic question and the two different types of phrasing involved, related to the presence or absence of time or temporality. The expression ‘the academic question’ might be somewhat misleading, however. The use of the definite article gives the impression that there was one single, standard question which was asked of all the respondents. By saying ‘the’ academic question, the implication is that the respondents were asked the same question, and that this question had the same meaning across all of the interviews. Indeed, the interview schedule in Appendix E would give this impression. However, we can appreciate from Table I that there was no one single version of this question. The question was not asked in a standard form across all of the interviews. Rather, all of the askings were
different. For example, while Will (6) was asked whether he would consider himself an academic, Hanako (12) was asked whether she aspires to be an academic. In a simple sense, therefore, it is difficult to single out any one specific meaning of ‘the academic question.’

Despite the lack of uniformity in the asking of these academic questions, however, there are nevertheless patterns of similarity across the askings. For instance, all of the questions involve the use of epistemic verbs, such as ‘consider,’ ‘feel’ and ‘think.’ Indeed, 83% (10/12) of the respondents were asked whether they (would) ‘consider’ themselves academics. A common sense understanding of such questions is that the interviewer is asking the respondents to look within themselves and report upon their thoughts or feelings about whether they consider themselves academics. To feel like an academic might be assumed to directly correspond to an inner ‘academic’ type feeling, and the epistemic verbs correspond to this inner mental or physical life. However, Wittgenstein (1958), in his later philosophy, argued that words such as ‘feel’ and ‘think’ perform rhetorical functions in conversations. Such words, along with language more generally, are used to perform deeds or social acts. For example, by using epistemic verbs, Wittgenstein argued, people can express certainty or doubtfulness about what they are saying or asking. Thus, in terms of their function, ‘verbs are used not only to express assessments of the factual quality of the embedded clause, but more significantly to index the statement with the level of commitment the speaker is prepared to give it’ (Mühlhäusler and Harré, 1990, p. 100). So, rather than being vehicles for expressing inner states, epistemic verbs can have social functions in conversations, relating to the factuality of what is being said, or how committed one is to what one is saying (for more on how Wittgenstein’s philosophy has influenced discursive psychology, see Shotter, 1993a, 1993b; Potter, 2001).

We therefore need to understand the asking of the academic question as a social activity. Particular assumptions are being made about the respondents when they are asked such questions. For example, by asking respondents whether they ‘consider,’ ‘feel’ or ‘think’ themselves to be academics, the interviewer is requesting that they express their beliefs about whether they are academics or not. The very expression of a belief on a matter is evidence of the potential contestability of that belief (Schiffrin, 1985; Billig, 1996, p. 251). The respondents
are not being asked whether they ‘are’ academics or not and to ‘think’ that you are an academic is different from saying that you ‘are’ an academic. Furthermore both of these are different from being ‘seen’ to be an academic in the eyes of others. By asking academic questions, and phrasing them as a matter of belief, the interviewer implies that there is an uncertainty about whether the respondents are indeed academics (see especially question 10).

Specific examples of this displayed uncertainty can be cited. Wendy (4), Punya (5), Ben (7), and Cathy (8) were asked whether they considered themselves to be academics ‘in any way,’ ‘in any sense,’ or ‘at all.’ Here, it is assumed that the respondents are not wholly academics, but that they might partially consider themselves to be academics. It is suggested that there might be meagre (or contestable) evidence of them considering themselves academics. The interviewer is therefore subtly remarking upon the unlikelihood of these respondents being academics. Furthermore, these respondents are also being required to give evidence to support their beliefs about whether they consider themselves academics. They are expected to state the ‘senses’ or ‘ways’ in which they consider themselves academics, providing justificatory evidence for their claims accordingly. We will look at the justificatory warrants given by the participants below.

Questions in Table I have been divided into Types I and II. Type II questions (25%; 3/12) involve a sense of time or temporality, whereas Type I questions (75%; 9/12) do not. Rachel, for example, was asked whether she feels herself ‘becoming’ an academic; Yoko whether she considers herself an academic ‘at the moment’; and Hanako if she ‘aspires’ to be an academic. In each of these askings it is assumed that the respondents’ identities are contested or undecided, and a potential progression is also implied. If Pamela feels herself ‘becoming’ an academic, then it is implied she is not one at the moment. Similarly while Yoko might consider herself an academic ‘at the moment’ she might not do so at other times; it is assumed that her identity is not solid and definite. Finally, when Hanako is asked whether she ‘aspires’ to be an academic, the implication is that she is not an academic at the present time. This observed difference between Type I and Type II questions suggests that the interviewer was displaying his understanding that his respondents might be in the process of ‘becoming’ academics.
In sum, the very asking of these ‘academic questions’ attests to the disputability of the respondents’ identities. The interviewer is setting up the respondents to deliberate or consider their status as academics or non-academics. In this sense their identities are literally in question. Furthermore the respondents may think that the various questions asked of them require different sorts of justificatory identity work in response. Let us now go on to consider the ways in which the participants responded to the various forms of the academic question.

Responding to academic questions

The academic questions which were asked of the respondents were never couched with qualifiers, suggesting that they were unusual and in need of explanation or justification. The interviewer did not excuse the questions before asking them. As such, it was assumed that the questions themselves were reasonable, and that asking the respondents such questions was a reasonable and ordinary thing to do. Equally, none of the respondents refused to answer their respective academic questions, or questioned the validity of the questions when providing their answers. Each respondent entertained the question and thereby treated it as reasonable. As Billig (1996) points out, ‘the mere act of answering a question imparts legitimacy to the question’ (p. 252). The respondents kept within the remit of questions which assumed that their identities were matters of doubt, uncertainty or dispute.

There was of course variability in how the participants responded to being asked their respective academic questions. Table II categorises their initial replies. An initial reply follows straight after the question and does not include any substantial divergence from the question. For example if a respondent says ‘no’ immediately after being asked their academic question, then this is considered their ‘initial’ reply. In the language of conversation analysis, an initial answer is the one most adjacent to the question (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). Only one respondent gave a non-initial answer to their academic question. It should also be noted that some respondents went on to change or modify their initial replies.
### Table II: How the respondents initially replied to their academic questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Neither</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Will*</td>
<td>Yoko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Punya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Samantha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hanako</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Reply was not initial

We can appreciate from Table II that overall, the question of whether the respondents in this study considered, felt or thought themselves to be (becoming) academics was not straightforward. Just as the participants were asked different questions, so they gave different answers, performing agreement, disagreement, both or neither. It seems as though the question of whether doctoral postgraduates and young lecturers feel themselves to be, or be becoming, academics is by no means straightforward.

From Table II we can see that 42% (5/12) of participants responded with ‘neither’ yes or no in response to their respective academic questions. For example, when she was asked ‘do you consider yourself an academic at the moment?’ Yoko said ‘I don’t know semi-academic.’ This was then followed by 34% (4/12) of participants who responded with ‘Yes,’ such as Sandy, who said ‘yeah yeah I do’ in response to the question ‘do you feel like an academic?’ 16% (2/12) of the respondents said ‘No’ including Anna, who gave the most unequivocal answer out of all the respondents; she latched her ‘no’ response to the end of the question ‘do you consider yourself an academic?’ Finally, one participant (8%) responded with ‘both’ yes and no. After displaying much difficulty with the question ‘so would you consider yourself an academic?’ Will gave the reply of ‘yes and no.’

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26 It is no coincidence that Will’s unique ‘yes and no’ reply was non-initial, see chapter 7.
The respondents in this study did not just give replies such as those listed above, followed by resolute silences. As well as giving their initial replies, all accompanied their answers with justificatory evidence, which was implied to support or refute the idea that they considered, felt or thought themselves to be academics. Table III expands upon Table II by illustrating the way in which participants gave evidence for and/or against themselves being academics.

Table III: Respondents' initial replies tabulated with evidence for and against them being academics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Reply</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Neither</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For</td>
<td>Ben, Fiona</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hanako</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against</td>
<td>Anna, Wendy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yoko, Catherine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For and</td>
<td>Rachel, Sandy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Will</td>
<td>Punya, Samantha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table III suggests that, in doing academic identity work, the doctoral postgraduates in this study are drawing upon skills of argumentation and rhetoric (Billig, 1996). Not only are they saying whether they consider themselves to be academics, they are also drawing upon evidential warrants, and making arguments which work to either support or refute the idea that they are academics (on warranting, see Gergen, 1989). All of the respondents employed evidence either for or against the idea that they are academics. An argumentative context was
therefore evident in the majority of respondents’ replies to their respective academic questions. But what counts as for and against evidence in this context?

Earlier it appeared as though the various academic questions the respondents were asked would occasion purely introspective answers. The use of epistemic verbs seemed to suggest that they would talk reflectively about their inner states of mind or feeling. Indeed, Mead (1934) has argued that introspection, or the capacity to objectify ourselves by talking reflectively, is central to the development of the self. However, from Table III we can appreciate that the respondents did not merely reflect upon their thoughts and feelings about whether they considered themselves academics. They used evidential warrants to support or justify their initial responses to the academic questions they were asked. Categories of the actual kinds of evidence given by the respondents are presented in Table IV.

Table IV: Types of evidential warrants identified by the respondents as qualifying or disqualifying them as academics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Evidence</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doing research</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Anna, Ben, Sandy, Yoko and Will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge, ideas and thinking</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ben, Catherine, Hanako and Samantha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publishing (including the RAE)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ben, Punya, Rachel and Will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifications (e.g. PhD)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Catherine, Rachel, Samantha and Will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking, socialising and lifestyle</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Punya, Samantha, Sandy and Will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference-going</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ben, Samantha and Sandy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching or lecturing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ben, Sandy and Will</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of respondents volunteered this information after giving their initial replies. Only one participant was asked by the interviewer why they had started to consider themselves an academic, thereby prompting them to provide justificatory evidence for their initial response.
When responding to the question of whether they considered, thought or felt themselves to be academics, participants often made assumptions about what counts as an academic. Table IV presents evidence used to either support or refute the idea that the respondents considered themselves to be academics. Although none of the participants explicitly stated that ‘an academic is somebody who ...’ they nevertheless assumed that there was a taken for granted definition of what an academic is by the way they gave their evidential warrants. For example, Ben said that he comes up with new ideas, researches, presents and publishes them, thereby suggesting that these are things that academics do. Each respondent spoke as though they were drawing upon a commonly shared definition or criteria of what it takes to be an academic. However, when we look across the interviews, we can see that there is no straightforward consensus about what an academic does. In a sense, each participant was working to a different definition. We will now consider some of the qualities which the doctoral postgraduates and young lecturers in the present study suggest credential a person as an academic.

In the book Academic Tribes and Territories, Tony Becher (1989) argues that in higher education, research and publishing are more highly regarded than teaching. He claims that ‘membership of the academic profession – at least in elite departments – is defined in terms of excellence of scholarship and originality in research, and not to any significant degree in terms of teaching capability’ (p. 3).\textsuperscript{28} From Table IV we can see that the most commonly cited evidential warrant for being an academic in this study was ‘doing research.’ Five respondents talked

\textsuperscript{28} Becher (1989) later reaffirms that ‘for the most part, in leading academic circles, credit is earned through the publication of one’s research findings; excellence in teaching counts for little towards recognition by established colleagues in the same field’ (p. 53).
about research when responding to their respective academic questions. For example, Anna said ‘I love research and I’m hoping to go on and do some kind of research-based job’ (see chapter 8). However, frequency of occurrence does not always indicate degree of importance. Although respondents more commonly associated research and publishing with being an academic than they did teaching or lecturing, we need to look at the meaning ascribed to these respective warrants.

Overall, research and publishing were implied to be straightforwardly positive indicators of academic status. In terms of publishing, for example, Will cited the fact that he has published things in peer reviewed journals as ‘objective’ evidence in favour of him being an academic. Punya said that she would like to consider herself an academic, but doesn’t know whether she can, because she hasn’t even published any studies yet. In both of these cases it is assumed that publishing is something that an academic does. Conversely, respondents implied that teaching and lecturing were ambivalent indicators of academic status. For example, Ben used his interest in teaching and mentoring students as evidence in favour of him being an academic, whereas after describing her experiences of teaching Sandy said that ‘I think feeling ... like an academic is more the research side of it.’ Will even suggested that both the quantity and quality of his teaching disqualified him as an academic (see chapter 7). So while research and publishing are implied to be straightforward indicators of academic status, in the sense that no respondent invoked these warrants as working against them being academics, teaching and lecturing were found to be ambivalent indicators.

Along with publishing, the second most commonly cited sets of criteria relating to academic status were ‘Knowledge, Ideas and Thinking,’ ‘Qualifications,’ and ‘Talking, Socialising and Lifestyle.’ Evidential warrants falling within these categories were each mentioned by four participants respectively. Included in the first category is Ben’s claim that he comes up with

29 Indeed, when samples of material are small, ‘counting frequencies of occurrence as an indicator of dominance or importance of themes or contents become less appropriate’ (Morant, 1998, p. 245).

30 As publishing is part of doing research, Punya and Rachel might have been added to the ‘doing research’ category. However, unless otherwise noted, the analysis stays with the categories explicitly mentioned by the respondents themselves. (In a content analysis it is sometimes difficult to keep the categories discrete. We will return to this issue at the end of the chapter.)
‘new ideas’ and Catherine’s idea that being an academic is being able to ‘think (...) quickly.’ Similarly Hanako said that she liked the process of ‘intellectual pursuit.’ In each of these cases it is suggested that, to be an academic, one must engage oneself mentally in a particular way. From the category ‘Qualifications’ the example of Catherine can be cited.\(^3\) She wondered whether ‘maybe doing a PhD is a way to sort of prove ... to everyone and yourself ... that you are in fact an academic sort of type.’ (We will consider the role of the PhD as an indicator of academic status in more detail in chapter 7.) Finally, in the category ‘Talking, Socialising and Lifestyle’ are participants such as Punya, who said ‘I would say that it’s become more academic the lifestyle.’ In making this claim, Punya suggests that her lifestyle was already somewhat academic, but that it has become more academic recently. Also Will remarked that ‘I do talk to my colleagues and we bounce ideas around’ and Sandy revealed that ‘I’ve got a great social life through parapsychology.’

The remaining evidential warrants are mostly self-explanatory, although it is worth pointing out a pattern which is common across the corpus. This is that each warrant points either to the ‘presence’ or ‘absence’ of a certain thing, which is in turn implied to either ‘qualify’ or ‘disqualify’ a person as an academic. So, for example, Samantha and Yoko both raised the issue of ‘confidence’ in their answers. Samantha suggested that she had only recently gained the confidence to speak at conferences and used this as evidence to support her claim for an academic identity. Yoko, on the other hand, suggested that she doesn’t have the confidence to claim a wholly ‘academic’ identity. In both of these cases it is presumed that ‘confidence’ is something which an academic ought to have. However, it is not always the case that the presence of a warrant equates with the presence of an academic identity. Yoko, for example, suggested that ‘having a lot of job experiences’ disqualifies her from being an academic (she says that her previous work experiences ‘split’ her identity).\(^3\) This suggests that the categories in a content analysis are not always equivalent to one another. That is, their actual

\(^3\) Although Punya is not counted in the ‘Qualifications’ category, by asking her to reflect on her identity as a ‘research student’ the interviewer displays an assumption that an academic identity and a research student identity can coexist (see Table I, Question 5).

\(^3\) Ben’s detest of admin is used in a similarly counter-intuitive way to credential him as an academic (see chapter 6).
status as categories is fluid, contingent, and dependent upon the contexts in which they are used. This means that the quantification of categories may be less helpful than might have been previously thought. We will return to this issue at the end of the chapter.

**Invoking ‘events in the world’ in response to ‘subjectivity’ questions?**

Earlier it was noted that the academic questions asked of the respondents seemed designed to occasion purely introspective answers. At face value the questions appeared to be asking the participants to reflect upon their inner states of mind or body, requiring them to talk of subjectivity, rather than outward reality. However, Table IV suggested that the kinds of evidential warrants drawn upon by respondents to justify their identity claims were not of a purely ‘subjective’ kind. Only 33% (4/12) of the warrants used in response to the academic question were implied to be subjective markers of academic status (‘Knowledge, Ideas and Thinking,’ ‘Having confidence,’ ‘Detest of admin,’ and ‘Feeling different to members of staff’ are all implied to be inner properties of the mind or body.) The majority of warrants index ‘events in the world’ in some way (67%, 8/12), such as ‘Doing research,’ ‘Publishing,’ and ‘Qualifications.’ If we look at Table V, which shows the kinds of discursive strategies used by respondents when answering their respective academic questions, we can see that invoking ‘events in the world’ was the most frequently used strategy.
Table V: Discursive strategies in answering the academic questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invoked events in the world</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Anna, Ben, Catherine, Punya, Rachel, Samantha, Sandy, Yoko and Will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invoked subjectivity</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ben, Catherine, Hanako, Samantha, Yoko and Wendy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invoked others</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Anna, Fiona, Rachel and Samantha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Told a story</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Punya, Samantha</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents tended to invoke external events more often than inner subjectivity when responding to their respective academic questions. 75% (9/12) of respondents employed this strategy. It is worth thinking about why this might be the case, given what was said earlier about the apparent design of the academic questions. Why did respondents invoke 'events in the world' more often than 'subjectivity' in their answers to questions which appeared as though they would require pure introspection?

Deborah Schiffrin (1985), in her study of arguments, observes a pattern in the way people express their beliefs. A person will often state their belief and then accompany this expression with justifications. Schiffrin gives the example of Irene, who expresses a belief in fate. In arguing for her position, Irene does not merely state her belief, and then go silent. Rather, she describes experiences in her life which, she claims, give support for her position. Schiffrin poses the question of why evidence of this kind is given to support the expression of a belief? She suggests that Irene’s position is potentially disputable because it is a representation of a belief. According to common sense reasoning beliefs reside within the mind. It is assumed that people cannot check the validity of these internal states. As such, expressions of belief are often accompanied by justifications, whereby evidence or explanation are given. This evidence might
involve descriptions of events in the world. Irene, for example, describes a fateful car accident.

Descriptions of events in the world can be given in the form of stories, and both Punya and Samantha told stories when replying to their respective academic questions. Samantha described attending a conference and informing one of the speakers (a senior lecturer) about a particular author of which she was unaware. Punya described missing the taxi to her friends' 21st birthday party and wondering whether to go home and do some reading, or catch another taxi and go down. These stories were not told 'for the sake of it' but were implied to have a 'point' to them (Polanyi, 1979; Schiffrin, 1981). They were each designed to support the claiming of academic identities, and not in order to disclaim those identities. Thus Samantha suggested that she has found her 'academic voice' and Punya claimed that her lifestyle had become 'more academic.' Similarly, several respondents invoked 'others' when responding to their academic questions, using their opinions to support the idea that they were academics. Rachel, for example, said that within the physio profession she is 'definitely regarded' as one of the academics, and Fiona said that 'people always say that I'm a natural academic' (see chapter 6). As with the stories told by Samantha and Punya, these 'others' were always of the opinion that the respondents in question were indeed academics.

If we look at Table VI we can appreciate the way in which participants rarely invoked purely 'inner' subjective justifications when claiming or disclaiming academic identities. The majority of respondents used justifications which only invoked 'outer' events in the world or justifications which invoked both 'inner' subjectivity and 'outer' events.

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33 For more on the analysis of stories from a discursive perspective, see chapter 8.
Table VI: Types of justification used by respondents in answering their academic questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outer Only</th>
<th>Inner Only</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Neither</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Hanako</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Fiona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punya</td>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Discursive psychologists have demonstrated that people often negotiate this sort of trade off between ‘mind’ and ‘world’ in their talk. Derek Edwards (1997) claims that ‘mind and world are at issue in discourse, rather than discourse being an expression of mind or a reflection of the world’ (p. 20; emphasis in original). The aim of the analyst is therefore to consider precisely how ‘mind-world relations are discursively constituted and traded off against each other’ (p. 19). However, to accomplish this successfully in the present study, we would need to do more than just categorise respondents like we have been doing so far. Should Anna’s ‘love of research’ be categorised as invoking ‘subjectivity’ or ‘events in the world’? In the end, the categories used in a content analysis tend to break down, in part because categories are for talking (Edwards, 1991). We therefore need to move to a discursive method of analysis which can deal with the local, ‘fuzzy,’ and contingent way in which psychological and social categories are used in everyday life.

**Concluding remarks**

This chapter has briefly demonstrated the benefits and limitations of using a linguistically sensitive content analysis to study doctoral postgraduate identity work within the context of semi-structured interviews. The main benefit has been that themes and patterns can be observed across a corpus of qualitative data. Frequencies of occurrence, commonalities and divergences can be tracked, and individual participants located within broader patterns and trends. As such, this
approach might be employed by discourse analysts as a way of handling large amounts of qualitative data, before moving on to more subtle and nuanced analyses.\textsuperscript{34}

It has been shown that, within each interview, respondents appeared to draw upon implied definitions of what counts as an academic, and used these definitions to frame their own giving of evidential warrants. For example, a respondent might assume that, in order to be an academic, one must publish frequently, and in high quality journals. They would then attempt to measure themselves using this criteria. While in the context of individual interviews this strategy appears to involve drawing upon an 'objective reality' of what it takes to be an academic, when we came to look across the interviews, we found that there was no agreement between the participants about what counts as an academic. No 'objective reality' was to be found. This lack of concensus implies a lack of truth about what it takes to be an academic, based upon the intersubjective evidence (Rorty, 1996). What this means is that we need to study the actual particulars of individual cases, considering how respondents construct the 'reality' of academic identities within the context of their interviews (Potter, 1995, 1996; Potter and Mulkay, 1985). This is one of the main aims of the following two chapters of discourse analysis, and the present content analysis should be seen as preliminary to this forthcoming analysis.

\textsuperscript{34} Although content analysis is essentially a quantitative methodology, the present analysis has consisted of both quantitative and qualitative observations. As such, it might not be categorised as a 'content analysis' at all. Needless to say categories – even categories of analytic methods – are slippery by their very nature.
Chapter Six – Rhetoric and Qualification in Claiming an Academic Identity

The present chapter is a discourse analysis of doctoral postgraduates claiming academic identities within the context of conversational interviews. Specifically, the analysis concerns how several of the interview respondents answered their ‘academic questions.’ We will be looking at how the doctoral candidates Ben, Fiona and Rachel answered their questions when they were asked them by Steven, the doctoral student interviewer. The three respondents selected in this chapter were classified in the previous chapter as claiming academic identities for themselves. That is, in the content analysis Ben, Fiona and Rachel all said ‘yes’ in response to their respective academic questions. In this sense, their replies appeared to be similar and related to one another. From a discourse and rhetoric perspective, however, these respondents used quite different strategies between one another to claim academic identities for themselves. This chapter presents some of the various different ways in which doctoral postgraduates can do academic identity work: issuing justificatory warrants; suggesting that the label ‘academic’ is undesirable; and claiming a mitigated version of that identity. We will find that there are similarities, as well as important differences, in how each of the respondents claimed their academic identities.

The case of Ben

First, we will look at Ben’s answer. ‘Ben’ is a 33 year old lecturer in Psychology at a University College in the United Kingdom. Although Ben is British, and did his undergraduate degree at a UK polytechnic, he did all of his postgraduate work in Canada. He spent around 10 years doing a Masters degree, a PhD and then finally working as an Assistant Professor (which is the Canadian equivalent of a UK lectureship) in Canada, before returning to the UK to take up his present lectureship in Psychology. At the time of the interview, he was waiting to fly back to Canada to ‘defend’ his thesis, which he was expecting to do in the next few months or so. In total, Ben will have taken around six years to do his doctorate. We join the interview as Steven is asking the academic question.
Extract 1

1 Steven you were talkin’ about erm career you know that career
development and that wd- would you consider yourself an
academic in any sense
(1.0)

5 Ben mmm ((swallows drink)) aahhhh (2.4) yeah itad- I think so
because er (0.7) errmmm (1.7) it’s a funny thing innit I wonder
how many (.) young people say yes to that (right) as compared
to er established people (yeah) but (yeah) if I- if I reflect on
the things that I do (0.9) try and come up with well come up
with new ideas research them (yeah) eererrr present them
publish them (mmmm) erm I mn- (.) I’m equally as interested
in in teaching and in mentoring students in err (yeah) in smaller
groups (yeah) so I like all aspects of that of academia the
thing I don’t like (right) is admin (.) and I (right) I really
deteHHSSt it (yeah yeah) so yeah I’d say that (mm) given
my interest the research and teaching and my (yeah) erhh
(.) ((slaps leg)) erhh (.) hmph detESST in admin then I
[probably am HU HU HU HU HU]

19 Steven [yeah YEAH HAH HAH HAH YEAH
20 Ben yeah
21 Steven yeah

Before he asks his academic question, Steven brings attention to how Ben was
talking about ‘career development’ (lines 1 to 2). This mentioning of career
development is important in two senses. Firstly, Steven implies that career
development is somehow related to academic identity. Secondly, Steven presents
Ben with a particular sense in which he is expected to answer the question. Ben
might be occasioned to speak about his identity in terms of career development.
for example.

The particular phrasing of this academic question is also important because
it relates to the character of Ben’s answer. Steven asks Ben whether he would
‘consider’ himself an academic. To consider oneself an academic is different from

115
actually being an academic. Steven therefore implies that there might be some doubt about Ben’s status as an academic. While Ben might consider himself to be an academic, this does not automatically mean that he is an academic. The exact wording of the academic question in this example is whether Ben ‘would consider’ himself an academic ‘in any sense’ (lines 2 to 3). Steven’s use of the word ‘would’ makes this question a polite request; the word softens the request and makes it indirect (Brown and Levinson, 1987). This asking is not as direct as the possible alternative of ‘do you consider yourself an academic’ for example. By phrasing the question in the particular way that he does, Steven implies that this might be a slightly delicate matter for Ben. The phrasing implies a thoughtfulness or conditionality with regards the answer.

In her study of discourse markers, Deborah Schiffrin (1987) observes that ‘virtually none of the questions which I asked during my interviews were answered with only the information required: very few yes-no questions, for example, received only a yes or no response’ (p. 159; emphasis in original). She goes on to say that her respondents often elaborated upon their answers, and expanded upon their initial responses. This observation is relevant to the answers to the academic questions; all of the respondents elaborated, explained or justified their initial responses. In the present sequence, Ben does not only say ‘yeah I think so’ (line 5) but goes on to explain his answer and justify himself.

The initial reply of ‘yeah I think so’ is an affirmation of a personal opinion. Ben ‘thinks’ that he would consider himself an academic. This is in line with how he was asked whether he would ‘consider’ himself an academic, which implies a process of thinking or deliberation. The word ‘think’ can be used to endow an expressed sentiment with a doubtfulness (Wittgenstein, 1958). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Schiffrin (1985) has shown that when people make arguments about their beliefs, they often give supporting justifications for those beliefs. Schiffrin identifies the pattern in rhetorical arguments of speakers making a claim to a ‘position’ and then giving ‘support’ for that position. This aspect of argumentative discourse is broadly reflected in the present interviews; the interview being a social context in which accounting work is normative (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995). The academic question works as a ‘position’ in the sense that it offers a proposal about identity which the respondents are expected to agree or disagree with.
Ben argues in favour of the idea that he is an academic by agreeing with the position expressed in the question, and by issuing justificatory warrants which work in favour of him being an academic. By warranting himself in this way, he gives the impression that his answer to the academic question, and therefore his claim to an academic identity, is rhetorical or argumentative in nature. Schiffrin (1985) has written that ‘[r]hetorical argument is a discourse genre in which the speaker establishes not just any position, but a position that is potentially disputable; in other words, speakers orient their presentations to a potential opposition’ (p. 40). The academic question sequence has an argumentative character in the sense that the question gives the impression that there is doubt or uncertainty about whether the respondent is indeed an academic. The very asking of a question such as this is suggestive of the disputability of the respondents’ identity.

Before going on to give justifications for his answer, and thereby warranting himself as an academic, Ben wonders how many young people say yes to the academic question, as compared to established people (lines 6 to 8). Ben’s wondering can be understood as a ‘meta move’ (Schiffrin, 1980; Simons, 1989, 1994) in the sense that he is reflexively bringing attention to the question he has just been asked. He is showing his awareness that this is a question within the context of a social science interview, wherein the frequency of responses between different social groups might be of interest. By wondering in this particular way, Ben is displaying his identity as a researcher. He is making a kind of research hypothesis; suggesting that there might be a difference between how these two groups respond to the academic question. By offering the category ‘young people’ first Ben implies that this is the group which might have trouble saying ‘yes’ to the academic question, as compared with ‘established’ people. He makes an implied equivalency between ‘established’ people and ‘academics’ and implies that ‘established’ people are old, rather than young.

Ben’s wondering can also be understood as an ‘insertion sequence’ (Schegloff, 1972; Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998) in the sense that it works to delay the provisioning of the ‘answer’ part of the ‘question and answer’ pair. However, Steven does not come in and clarify matters at this moment (see line 8), which he might have done, given his status as the interviewing researcher. This might have
further delayed the provisioning of Ben’s answer to the question. Instead, Ben returns to the business of answering the question.

When he says ‘if I reflect on the things that I do’ (lines 8 to 9) Ben gives the impression that his status as an academic is conditional upon the things that he does, which he is about to reflect upon. In this sense he implies that the things he is about to reflect upon were in existence before reflecting upon them (Pollner, 1987). Also, he suggests that he is about to be impartial or objective about the things that he does. The use of the word ‘reflect’ gives this impression. In this sense the declaration of ‘reflecting’ works to build up the factuality of Ben’s identity claims (Potter, 1996). The utterance seems to be ‘constructed to avoid it seeming like an artful construction designed to further the speaker’s interests’ (Edwards and Potter, 1992, p. 105).

Ben goes on to justify or account for his ‘yeah I think so’ answer by using ‘warrants’ to credential himself as an academic (Gergen, 1989). The first thing he says is ‘try and come up with- well come up with new ideas’ (lines 12 to 13). At this point Ben almost says that he ‘tries’ to come up with new ideas, but cuts himself off and repairs himself by saying ‘well come up with new ideas’ (on conversational repairs, see Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks, 1977). To try and come up with new ideas is not the same as actually coming up with them. Someone might ‘try’ to come up with new ideas and only come up with old ones, for example. Alternatively, they might fail to come up with any ideas at all. If the word ‘try’ had not been repaired, Ben might have presented himself as a person who ‘tries’ to be a research academic, rather than someone who ‘is’ a research academic. The self repair corrects the offending word and avoids this risky presentation of self (Billig, 1997; Goffman, 1959).

By attempting to claim an academic identity for himself, there is a risk that Ben might present himself as a non-academic. By being asked to speak about his own identity, Ben becomes caught in a specific ‘dilemma of stake’ (Edwards and Potter, 1992). Namely, credentialing himself as an academic, whilst at the same time avoiding the implication that he is a non-academic. Ben presents himself as a successful research academic when he says ‘research them ... eeerrrr present them publish them’ (lines 10 to 11). This three part list of researching, presenting and publishing ideas gives the impression of a smooth research progression, in which each activity easily and straightforwardly leads onto the next (on listing, see
This listing also gives the impression of the kind of ‘career development’ which Steven brought attention to in his question; each academic activity moves onto the next without any problems.

Ben says that he is ‘equally’ as interested in teaching and in mentoring students in smaller groups (lines 11 to 13). By constructing his interests in this way, he implies that he is not biased in favour of research. He implies that he is not only a ‘research’ academic but rather that he is also a ‘teaching’ academic. At this moment, Ben is speaking as though he is drawing upon taken for granted, commonly held criteria for what counts as an academic.

Ben goes on to say ‘so I like all aspects of that of academia’ (line 13) and thereby constitutes himself as an academic. By using the word ‘so’ Ben implies that he is drawing the upshot of what he has just been saying (on discourse markers such as ‘so’ see Schiffrin, 1987). He suggests that his liking of all those aspects of academia works in favour of him being an academic. The claim to liking ‘all’ those aspects of academia is a total case formulation which Ben uses to legitimise his argument that he is an academic (on extreme case formulations, see Pomerantz, 1986). However, extreme formulations are not always said literally (Edwards, 2000). When Ben goes on to say that ‘the thing I don’t like … is admin (. ) and I … I really deteHHSSt it’ (lines 14 to 15) he contradicts his claim about liking all aspects of academia, by saying that he doesn’t like admin.

There is a subtle feature of this utterance which is deserving of attention. This is the within speech laughter which occurs when Ben says ‘deteHHSSt.’ In her analysis of laughter in conversation, Gail Jefferson (1985) argues that it is important to take notice of the precise placement of laughter which occurs within utterances. She analyses a specific case of within speech laughter and notices that ‘the laughter is present in and only in a discrete segment of that utterance; in the saying of an obscenity. The rest of the utterance is free of laughter’ (p. 30). In the present sequence, the interpolated laughter comes in the middle of the word ‘deteHHSSt’ and this is the only point in the utterance when laughter occurs. By laughing as he says this word, Ben implies that his detest of admin is not something to be taken too seriously. He gives the impression that the detest of admin is a humorous matter. While the word ‘really’ works to intensify the detest of admin, Ben’s laughter seems to mitigate some of that intensity. It is almost as if
the within speech laughter works to repair the extremity expressed in the claim of detesting admin.

By saying that he really detests admin, Ben gives the impression that he has had experience with admin, and therefore that he has experience of working within academia. That is, he has done academic admin enough to know that he detests it. In a subtle way, then, Ben’s claim about detesting admin works to credential himself as an academic, or at least someone who has had experience with academic activities. However, Ben might also be presenting an argument against himself being an academic, because he is saying that he dislikes, or detests, something that is a feature of contemporary academia. His detest of admin might therefore work as evidence against him being an academic. However, Ben is quick to come in with a conclusion which contradicts this implication:

Extract 1 (continued)

15 deteHHSSt it (yeah yeah) so yeah I’d say that (mm) given
16 my interest the research and teaching and my (yeah) erhh
17 (. ) ((slaps leg)) erhh (.) hmph detESST in admin then I
18 [probably am HU HU HUH HUH HUH
19 Steven [yeah YEAH HAH HAH HAH YEAH

Ben uses a particular rhetorical strategy to credential himself as an academic during this sequence. He says ‘given’ his interest, the research and teaching, and his detest in admin, ‘then’ he probably is an academic. The ‘given this … then that’ structure works rhetorically in a similar way to how Ben said he would ‘reflect’ on the things that he does. He gives the impression that the evidence is already there, prior to his formulation of it, and therefore that he is being impartial or objective about his identity. He implies that he can accept what is ‘given’ as being beyond doubt. This strategy therefore works as a persuasive argument to credential Ben as an academic.

A subtle feature of this conclusion can be noted. By saying ‘my’ interest and ‘my’ detest in admin (line 16), Ben suggests that he personally owns these qualities. The subtle shift from what were earlier described as activities or likes and dislikes (lines 9 to 15) to what are now personally owned qualities improves
Ben's grounds for claiming to be an academic. This is because the qualities which make him an academic have implicitly become stable parts of his character (cf. Wetherell and Potter, 1989).

Another important shift takes place at this moment. When Ben makes his conclusion, he makes an identity claim which is an upgraded version of what Steven asked for in his question. Ben says 'I probably am' (lines 17 to 18) and thereby makes a cautious claim to being, rather than saying that he would 'consider' himself (an academic). While the word 'probably' mitigates the strength of the claim, the 'I am' intensifies it. Also, the word 'probably' gives the impression that this conclusion is inevitable. It is as if the evidence suggests that he 'probably' is an academic. He implies that this particular conclusion follows from the premise; that, given the facts of the situation, this is the conclusion. While Ben initially responded to the academic question by invoking his thoughts or feelings with 'yeah I think so' (line 5) he finishes his answer by invoking the outward facts of the situation, and then concluding with 'I probably am.' It is paradoxical that the more this final conclusion is hedged with words like 'probably,' the stronger or more persuasive the argument appears to be. Ben is giving the impression that he is making his conclusion based upon the facts of his situation, and not his inner thoughts or feelings.

However, it is important to point out that Ben does not actually say what he 'is' at this moment. After saying 'I probably am' he begins to laugh (line 18). Steven then echoes this laughter (line 19) before Ben then laughs again (line 18). By laughing in this way, Ben avoids explicitly naming what he is, and leaves it as something which is assumed. In this sense the laughter works as a kind of 'not naming device' (Wooffitt, 1992). Ben does not say the word 'academic' at the point where he might have been likely to, and nor does he mention it anywhere else in his answer. In the place of where the identity category might have come, Ben begins to laugh.

Why does Ben laugh at this moment? Specifically, the laughter seems to be associated with his 'detest in admin.' Ben laughs for the first time when he says that he really detests admin (line 15) and he also slaps his leg in a comical fashion just before offering his 'detest in admin' as evidence that he is an academic (line 17). Also, Ben laughs again after making the final identity claim (line 18). It might be that the laughter is associated with the irony of how detesting admin can work
in favour of Ben being an academic, rather than working against him. It was mentioned before that to dislike or detest something which is a part of academia might work against a person claiming to be an academic. But by using his detest of admin as justification for him being an academic, Ben implies that admin is like a non-academic aspect of academia. Admin is a non-academic intrusion within academia, and something which ‘proper’ academics ought not to like. Ben implies that it is something of a commonplace that academics dislike admin. To like admin might make a person a secretary or a bureaucrat, for example, instead of an academic. The humour at the end of the sequence seems therefore to be associated with how Ben claims his academic identity in this seemingly counter-intuitive way.

In a more general sense, to claim to be an academic is to make a claim for a social position which can be imbued with an implicit status. However, the social demands of politeness mean that Ben is careful not to present himself as being too presumptuous or boastful about his status as an academic (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Ben uses ‘situational, spontaneous or informal humour’ (Mulkay, 1988, p. 57) after claiming that he probably is an academic. This humour might work to lessen the potentially boastful implications of Ben claiming the identity of academic for himself in too strong or serious a manner. By laughing at the end of this sequence, instead of remaining serious, Ben avoids giving the impression that he is being conceited or boastful about his academic identity.

In summary, Ben makes a conclusion in which he uses all of the things he has ‘reflected’ upon previously as evidence in favour of him being an academic. He even uses his ‘detest in admin’ as evidence which works in his favour. So, although he said that he was about to ‘reflect’ on the things that he does, Ben only gives evidence which works in favour of him being an academic. He never provides any evidence to the contrary, which would imply that he was a non-academic.
Who wants to be an academic?

In this section, we will continue to consider the status aspects of claiming an academic identity, by looking at Fiona’s answer to the academic question. ‘Fiona’ had recently submitted her thesis in psychology at a new university. At the time of the interview, she was in the process of preparing for her PhD viva voce examination. Before starting her doctorate, Fiona did an undergraduate degree in the same subject at the same university. We join the interview just before Steven asks Fiona the academic question. We will be paying particular interest in how Fiona replies to the question, and how her identity work is similar and different to that of Ben.

Extract 2

1 Steven so what’s that job that you’re goin- (.) that you’ve
2 actually got
3 (.)
4 Fiona eerm [it’s in ((institution))]
5 Steven [it’s in ((institution))] an yeah
6 Fiona erm it’s at ((college))
7 (.6)
8 Steven yeah
9 (.)
10 Fiona just basically a straightforward lectureship in psychology (yeah)
11 but eerrm it’s quite exciting HUH (yeah yeah) basic- cos it’s
12 living in ((city)) which is a fantastic place for an academic to be
13 (yeah) (. ) so (yeah) (0.8) just (. ) quite (. ) up’n (. ) hyper about
14 that at the [moment
15 Steven [yeah yeah do you consider yourself an academic wd-
16 would you say?]
17 (0.9)
18 Fiona yeah I do most people kind of squirm when you give them
19 that kiHHnd of label
20 Steven YHHHHUH[HUH
21 Fiona [HHH HUH HUH
22 Steven yeah
23 Fiona people always say that I’m a natural academic and I’m not
24 really too sure what that means
25 Steven [HHHHH HUUHUH huh
26 (0.8)
27 Fiona NO I’m not sure whether they’re being nice or whether that’s offensive but (yeah) yeah I consider myself an academic it’s the only thing I can do really=
28 Steven =YEAH what do you think it means (. ) you know what-
29 what does that involve d’you think?
30 (0.7)
31 Fiona I think people just have preconceptions that (. ) academics are very out of touch with reality and (yeah) they live in their little ivory tower and do their researching and (yeah) don’t have any contact with other people (. ) erm (0.8) and they’ve got quite a scatty kind of image uhuh (yeah) a professory kind of image (yeah) erm (0.9) I think a lot of people think of academics as quite pretentious as well (yeah) (0.6) but erm (0.9) n’ats what I do I’m (. ) I’m okay with that label [HHHHH
32 [yeah yeah (0.7) yeah

We can see that Fiona takes quite a different approach to answering the academic question, as compared with Ben. She does not refer to her own activities as ‘warrants’ in the same way as Ben did when he credentialled himself as an academic. For example, Fiona does not mention anything about her teaching, publishing or detesting admin. It is only when she says that ‘people always say that I’m a natural academic’ (line 23) that she could be understood as warranting herself as an academic. If people are ‘always’ saying this about her, then, it is implied, there must be some truth in what they are saying. This particular claim could work as an ‘external’ warrant in favour of Fiona being an academic.

In the answer that Ben gave to the academic question, the desirability of being an academic was not identified explicitly as an issue. By credentialing
himself as an academic. Ben gave the impression that being an academic was something desirable to him. Whereas Ben attempted to warrant himself as an academic, Fiona is more concerned to talk about the significance or meaning of being labelled an academic. Specifically, she implies that the social identity of ‘academic’ has negative connotations surrounding it, that the identity is derided by people, and therefore that it is an unwanted or undesirable identity. In the words of Goffman (1968), it is a ‘stigmatised’ identity. However, at the same time, Fiona actually claims that identity for herself, and as such implies that there must be something about an academic identity which she herself finds desirable or favourable. We will see this tension between the desirability and undesirability of the academic identity is an important feature of Fiona’s answer.

Let us first look at the sequence before the academic question is asked, which is important in terms of how it relates to Fiona’s subsequent answer to the question. At the start of the extract, Steven asks Fiona about the job she is about to take up (lines 1 to 2). Fiona says that she is going for ‘just basically a straightforward lectureship in psychology … but ermm it’s quite exciting HUH’ (lines 10 to 11) then later says that she is ‘just (. ) quite (. ) up’n (. ) hyper about that at the moment’ (lines 13 to 14). Fiona uses the words ‘just,’ ‘basically’ and ‘straightforward’ to depreciate the significance or importance of the job she has got (on uses of the word just, see Lee, 1987). She gives the impression that there is nothing special about the job itself. Then she uses the word ‘but’ and goes on to express her excitement about the job, saying that it’s ‘quite exciting HUH’ because the city she will be living in is a fantastic place for an academic to be. The word ‘quite’ works here as a mitigator and places a limit on the excitement that Fiona is expressing. She does not boast about her upcoming lecturing post but rather gives a measured and modest rendition of her excitement. The laughter at this moment (‘but ermm it’s quite exciting HUH’) also works to mitigate some of the boastful implications of her being excited about her job. This pattern of depreciation and mitigation during this early part of the extract (lines 10 to 14) might be evidence of the potential status implications involved in getting an academic lectureship. Fiona’s modesty points to the possibility that this academic job, and the associated identity of being an academic, is in some way desirable partly because of its status. However, while she mitigates her excitement, Fiona does not mitigate how ‘fantastic’ the city she will be living in is.
By saying that the city she is going to be living in is a ‘fantastic place for an academic to be’ (line 12) Fiona implies that she is an academic, or that she will be an academic when she is working as a lecturer in this city. Whatever the implication, she is taking an implicitly favourable stance towards the academic identity. By saying that she is quite up and hyper about it at the moment (lines 13 to 14), Fiona gives the impression that she wants to be an academic in this place. Steven interrupts Fiona at this point and asks her the academic question (line 15). The actual rendition of the question ‘do you consider yourself an academic would you say?’ begins in a more direct manner than how, in extract one, Steven asked Ben ‘would you consider yourself an academic in any sense?’ In the present sequence, Steven uses the form ‘do you’ instead of ‘would you.’ Although this directness is then mitigated by the addition of ‘would you say’ (line 16) which softens the asking and makes it less direct.

When she replies to the academic question, Fiona answers the initial form of the question. She does not reply with the possible ‘yeah I would’ but rather says ‘yeah I do’ (line 18). Fiona’s initial reply of ‘yeah I do’ is suggestive of an implicit tension which is drawn out more explicitly in the remainder of the sequence. This is the tension between the general discrediting of the academic label and Fiona’s claiming of the identity of academic for herself. While she emphasises her ‘yeah I do’ this is not the emphasis associated with eagerly adopting the identity of academic. Rather, it is Fiona displaying her awareness that what she is doing might be somewhat unusual or questionable. This initial avowal seems to be a subtle example of the reflexivity of the self that Anthony Giddens (1991) has described. Giddens argues that modern day selves are created out of a process of reflexivity in which people contemplate themselves and what they are doing at regular intervals. The central paradox is that it is through reflecting upon the self that the self actually comes into being. Giddens writes that ‘self-identity today is a reflexive achievement’ (p. 215). Fiona’s ‘yeah I do’ has a reflexive quality in the sense that she is claiming an academic identity, while at the same time implicitly remarking upon that claim, and marking it out as conspicuous, or in need of some explanation.

The first explicit indication that Fiona is presenting the ‘academic’ label as being unwanted or undesired by people is when she says that ‘most people kind of squirm when you give them that kind of label’ (lines 18 to 19). To ‘squirm’ is
to display your distaste for what is happening to you; you are showing that you do not like what is happening. Fiona implies that ‘academic’ is in a class of labels which people squirm at by saying ‘that kind’ of label. Furthermore, by identifying the general class of ‘most people’ Fiona implies that there is a popular and generalised disliking of being given the academic label, which suggests that the label itself is problematic. By saying ‘yeah I do’ and thereby claiming the academic identity for herself, Fiona suggests that she is not the same as ‘most people.’ She is not squirming, but rather is claiming the academic identity, whilst at the same time subtly bringing attention to its status as a generally derided label.

It was mentioned earlier that when Fiona says people always say she’s a natural academic (line 23) she could be credentialing herself as an academic. However, she goes on to say that she is not sure whether people are being ‘nice’ or ‘offensive’ when they call her a natural academic (lines 27 to 28). Fiona thereby shows an awareness that calling someone a ‘natural academic’ could work as either a compliment or an insult. In relation to this, Sue Widdicombe (1998) has written that ‘it is likely that on occasions the ascription of category membership may be used to make available unfavourable inferences about a person’ (p. 53). However, Fiona shows that she is not taking the potentially offensive nature of this name calling seriously. She does this by laughing when she says ‘or whether that’s offensive’ (lines 27 to 28). By laughing at the point just before she says the word ‘offensive’ Fiona shows that she is not taking seriously the possibility that people are being offensive when they say that she is a natural academic. However, Michael Mulkay (1988) has pointed out that the ‘adoption of the humorous mode does not necessarily imply that one’s speech is completely devoid of serious meaning or serious intent’ (p. 67). Indeed, we will see later on that Fiona claims people have some rather critical ideas about what academics are like.

Although Fiona entertains the idea that people might be being ‘nice’ or ‘offensive’ when they say that she’s a natural academic, she does not question the legitimacy of the actual identity category they are identifying her with. Fiona does not express doubt about whether they are correct or not in calling her a ‘natural academic.’ It is in this sense that their name calling does seem to work as a credentialing device for her considering herself an academic.

After wondering about the honourable intentions of the name callers, Fiona says ‘but’ (line 28) and thereby gives a subtle indication that she is moving from
the humorous realm to the serious realm (Mulkay, 1988). She is making a shift from a jokey reply to the question, which does not directly answer the question, to a more serious reply, which directly addresses the issue of how she considers herself. When Fiona says ‘yeah I consider myself an academic’ (line 28) she does not laugh, as she has been doing previously. Furthermore, she does not reflexively bring attention to her answer, as she did when she initially responded with ‘yeah I do’ (line 18). Instead, she echoes the wording of the academic question, and by repeating these words, presents this as an answer to the question (on this kind of echoing, see Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995). By saying that she ‘considers’ herself an academic, Fiona stays with the wording of the academic question. She talks about how she considers herself, rather than making any claims about her ‘being’ an academic, as Ben did. For example, she does not say that she ‘is’ an academic. At this moment Fiona gives the impression that she is making a serious identity claim. The interchange thereby loses some of its prior jokey or humorous quality.

After making this claim about considering herself an academic, Fiona makes a self-depreciatory comment, saying ‘it’s the only thing I can do reaHHHlly’ (lines 28 to 29). The claim about ‘only’ being able to do academia is in line with the idea that Fiona is a ‘natural academic.’ She uses the word ‘only’ to single out being an academic as the one thing that she can do. Like a natural academic, who is born to do one single thing, Fiona excludes any alternative things that she might be able to do (on the uses of the word ‘only’ see Billig, 1999a, p. 127). However, the within speech laughter during the word ‘reaHHHlly’ (line 29) works to undermine the seriousness or literal nature of the claim that being an academic is all that she can do. Fiona marks the claim as being partly humorous, and therefore not to be taken too literally or definitely. By making this depreciatory comment immediately after the identity claim, Fiona counters the potentially boastful implications of adopting the academic identity. She undermines the significance of her considering herself an academic and gives a modest account of her academic

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35 Considering that Fiona was 24 years old at the time of the interview, and went directly from an undergraduate degree to a doctorate, we might suppose that she has not actually tried anything else, other than studying or working within a university setting. However, Steven did not ask Fiona about this.
self, which suggests that there is something more than to an academic identity than it being stigmatised.

**Appearance versus reality of academic identities**

Fiona describes the word academic as a ‘label’ (lines 19 and 40). Labelling might be an activity which is done to oneself by others, rather than something than one does to oneself (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995). For example, someone can be ‘given’ the academic label (lines 18 to 19), and Fiona says that people always say that she’s a natural academic (line 23). They are thereby labelling her with the label ‘academic.’

When Steven asks her what she thinks it means, ‘what does that involve d’you think’ (lines 30 to 31), Fiona specifies those qualities which she believes are commonly associated with the academic label (lines 33 to 39). In this final part of the extract, Fiona changes her footing (Goffman, 1983). She shifts from talking about herself to talking about what other ‘people’ think of academics. By using the general category ‘people’ Fiona implies that these people are not academics. She does not imply that academics hold such beliefs about one another, but rather that non-academics do. Furthermore, she implies that she herself does not hold these beliefs. They are the opinions of other people, and not of herself. Fiona therefore constructs the appearance of academic identity whilst simultaneously distancing herself from those appearances.

To begin with, Fiona thinks that people just have ‘preconceptions’ about academics (line 33). By identifying the thoughts people have about academics as ‘preconceptions’ Fiona places a doubt over the validity of their thoughts. A preconception might be a ‘conception’ that has been formed ‘prior’ to the proper knowledge has being gained about academia. In this sense a preconception resembles a stereotype (Pickering, 2001). Fiona is implicitly suggesting that these people have had no contact with academics, or experience of academia, and that they have formed their opinions without having the appropriate knowledge. If they still hold their preconceptions upon gaining this experiential knowledge, then it is implied that they could be classed as prejudiced, because their conceptions have not altered accordingly (Allport, 1954). The very invoking of what ‘people think’ (line 38) is enough to suggest that a difference is being constructed between these
people's thoughts and the actual reality, or truth, of academia. While these people might 'think' that academics are this and that, this does not mean that they actually are.

The first preconception that Fiona identifies is that 'academics are very out of touch with reality' (lines 33 to 34). As Fiona introduces this criticism of academics as a 'preconception' it is therefore implied to be an unfounded criticism. Fiona implies that, in actuality, academics either are in touch with reality, or are more in touch with reality than people might think. However, whilst people might be wrong in thinking that academics are 'very' out of touch with reality, it is implicitly conceded that they might be right in thinking that they are 'somewhat' out of touch with reality.

When Fiona describes people's preconceived thoughts about academics, she distances herself from these thoughts, and mounts implicit criticisms against them. Fiona performs a kind of 'double-declaiming' (Billig, 1992). That is, she identifies people's preconceived thoughts, and at the same time implicitly suggests that there are more real or accurate understandings of academics and academia. The apparent appearance of academics – as evinced in the 'label' or the 'image' – is implied to lie in contrast with the actual reality of academics. This reality is implied to exist underneath or behind the label or the image. Fiona seems to be drawing upon the common sense distinction between appearance and reality in her answer to the academic question (see Pollner, 1975, 1987; Eglin, 1979; Potter, 1987, 1988; Edwards, 1991; Edwards, 1997, p. 248). She implies that if you peel the label away, you will find the truth about academics.

The particular description of 'image' (line 37) is important for how it relates to the appearance versus reality distinction. The 'image' of a person can be superficial and misleading. It can distract a person from the 'real' substance which lies behind the image. While academics might have a scatty or professory kind of image (lines 36 to 37), this does not mean that they are actually scatty or professory. They might appear different upon closer inspection, or upon actual meaningful contact with them.

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36 A similar pattern is evident in the thought of academics 'living' in their 'little' ivory tower, doing their researching (lines 34 to 35). This description has a fairytale-like quality to it and is therefore implied to be an inaccurate description of what academics do.
Thus, Fiona implies that there are different and more accurate understandings of academics, which stand apart from the preconceived ideas people have about them. She suggests that there are people who do not hold such preconceived ideas, and instead hold the ‘correct’ or ‘true’ versions of what academics and academia are like. For example, when she says ‘I think a lot of people think of academics as quite pretentious as well’ (lines 38 to 39) she implicitly suggests that academics are in fact not pretentious, or at least that they are only slightly pretentious. The use of the word ‘quite’ means that people could be wrong even if academics were only pretentious to a small degree.

Fiona talks about the preconceptions people have of ‘academics’ and how ‘they’ live in their little ivory tower and ‘they’ have quite a scatty kind of image. By using this kind of footing to describe the conceptions people have of academics, Fiona ends up distancing herself from ‘academics’ and implies that she is not one of ‘them.’ This is especially the case when she says ‘and they’ve got quite a scatty kind of imagHHe’ (lines 36 to 37). Here Fiona is suggesting that this is a claim she is making about academics; she is not identifying herself as an academic who has quite a scatty kind of image. However, Fiona then goes on to say ‘but erm (0.9) n’ats what I do I’m (. ) I’m okay with that label HHHHH’ (lines 39 to 40) and thereby makes a claim for the academic label.

What are we to make of these final identity claims? At this particular moment, Fiona could have gone on to contradict the preconceptions that people have of academics or academia, and given an account of what academics are ‘really’ like. After saying ‘but erm’ she could have proceeded to specify why those people are wrong. However, she instead comes in with the seemingly straightforward defence of ‘n’ats what I do’ and then makes an evaluation with ‘I’m (. ) I’m okay with that label.’ With the word ‘but’ Fiona returns back to the question of her own identity, which was the focus of the previously asked academic question, and finishes her answer. By claiming that this is what she ‘does’ Fiona implicitly appeals to the facts of her situation. She implies that the issue of what she does is straightforward and unproblematic. This is what she does therefore this is what she is (Sacks, 1992). This claim echoes what she said earlier about academia being the only thing she can do (lines 28 to 29). She subtly appeals to the facts of her situation, rather than to her thoughts on the matter.
Fiona says that she is ‘okay’ with the label, and not that she is ‘delighted’ or ‘excited’ with it. However, she is equally not ‘squirming’ with discomfort at being given the label. By saying she is ‘okay’ with it Fiona gives the impression that she is reluctantly or matter-of-factly accepting the academic label, a label which she has previously identified as being derided by people. Basically, this is an unwanted label. It is an identity which, she implies, people do not want. Fiona is being reasonable and accepting the label, whilst not necessarily agreeing with people’s preconceptions about what academics are like. After all, Fiona strongly implies that the things people associate with the label of academic are in fact incorrect. So, when she claims an academic identity for herself, Fiona implies that she is not claiming those apparent aspects of academics which other people make claims about.

Fiona implies that the ‘label’ of academic is different from the actual or real identity of the academic, in terms of lived experience for example. She implies that the actual life of an academic is not the same as the preconceptions associated with the ‘label.’ She can be labelled as an academic, but because the attributes associated with the label are incorrect or invalid, they are not implied to map onto her actual or real identity as an academic. By mounting implicit criticisms of the preconceived thoughts that people have about what academics are like, Fiona does some subtle and indirect identity work for herself. She suggests that she does not share the same thoughts about academics, and that academics and those who have the appropriate knowledge do not either.

When she says that she considers herself an academic (lines 18 and 28), Fiona is surely not adopting those preconceived ideas that people have of academics? Being okay with that ‘label’ is different from conceding either that the people with the preconceptions are correct, or that she is adopting all of the previously identified negative characteristics of academics (being out of touch with reality, scattyness, and so on) for herself. Throughout the sequence Fiona has suggested that there are other, more favourable (and therefore more desirable) ways of understanding academics, although she never actually explains what these are. We might suggest that Fiona drawing upon another set of attributes or characteristics about academics and academia which are strongly implied, but left largely unexplicated. What is interesting about this pattern of double-declaiming is
that Fiona never actually articulates what academics are ‘really’ like. These ideas remain largely unsaid during this sequence (Billig, 1999a).

By giving the impression that the academic identity is considered by people to be undesirable, Fiona is able to claim that identity without warranting herself as an academic. She avoids doing the kind of credentialing work that Ben did by giving the impression that the academic identity is not a sought after identity. If Fiona had specified why those people are wrong about academics, and gone on to elaborate upon the ‘reality’ of academia, then she might have presented the academic identity as having positive, and therefore desirable, aspects. Instead, she lets the high status of her forthcoming academic appointment speak for itself.

Fiona’s dilemma seems to be how to create the impression that an identity category is generally discredited, whilst at the same time claiming that identity for herself. If she identifies certain desirable aspects of being an academic, then the category itself becomes desirable, and she would need to make claims to warrant herself, as Ben did. However, by deriding the category too much, she runs the risk of making it entirely undesirable. Fiona gives the impression that identity of the academic has been derided by people, while at the same time hinting that this is not the whole story about academics or academia.

**Career and the qualified academic**

Finally, we will look briefly at the case of Rachel. Rachel’s answer to the academic question was similar to Ben and Fiona’s in the sense that she replied with a ‘yes.’ However, her reply was different because she qualified her claim to an academic identity by saying that she would regard herself as a ‘junior academic.’ We will look at this qualified version of academic identity work and also the issue of career rhetoric.

‘Rachel’ was a 36 year old doctoral student of sociology. At the time of the interview, she was in the third year of her PhD, and expecting to submit her thesis within the next six months. Prior to taking up her doctorate, Rachel worked in a research unit at a city hospital on a health services related project. At this time she also did a Masters degree in order to get further research training. Prior to this, Rachel worked for eight years in clinical practice as a physiotherapist.
We join the interview a few moments before ‘the academic question’ is asked. Steven is asking Rachel about whether her PhD fits into some kind of career. We will find that this previous sequence is related to the asking of the academic question itself, and Rachel’s answer to that question.

Extract 3

1 Steven you mentioned earlier the word career (.) and erm I was
2 thinkin’ can you think of it yknw in that kind of career (.)
3 sense of havin’ a (.) of your PhD fitting into some kind of
4 (yes) a career [at all yeah] yeah
5 Rachel [oh yeah yeah] yes I mean my my intention
6 ((cough)) well (1) my ideal will be t- to (0.8) to continue to do
7 (0.6) research rather than for instance moving into teaching
8 or lecturing (right) and I’d love to get another (.) fellowship
9 of some sort (yeah) but you know (.) those aren’t that
10 eaHHsy to come by (yeah yeah) but but certainly you know
11 my (. ) my PhD has been (0.6) yknw (0.7) as I said it was
12 sort’ve VAGUELY- it was desired perhaps rather than
13 absolutely planned but (.) yknw as part of a progression
14 towards (yeah) an academic career (yeah) and it has
15 developed me (0.9) erh (.) the- yknw uh aspects of me
16 towards meeting that career as well I think (yeah) or is doing so
17 (yeah) yeah
18 Steven do you feel yourself (.) becoming an academic or you think
19 you already are one or
20 (2.9)
21 Rachel eehrrrmm (2.3) YEAH I would regard myself as as a sort’ve
22 wha- as a probably as a junior academic in that (mmmmmm)
23 I’m not highly published I published from the trial but I
24 haven’t published from this yet (right) erm but I ((coughs))
25 er and certainly within- within the physio profession
26 I def- I’m definitely regarded as a- one of the academics
In a similar sense to how, in extract one, Steven said that Ben was ‘talkin’ about career’ (lines 1 to 2), in the present extract, Steven brings attention to Rachel’s mentioning of the word ‘career,’ and then asks her whether she can think of her PhD as fitting into ‘some kind of ... a career at all’ (lines 1 to 4). Rachel replies positively to this question, and goes on to say ‘my intention ((cough)) well (1) my ideal will be t- to (0.8) to continue to do (0.6) research rather than for instance moving into teaching or lecturing’ (lines 5 to 8). There are two aspects of this utterance which are of relevance. The first point is that Rachel corrects ‘my intention’ to ‘my ideal’ when she talks about what she will do after her PhD. Having an ‘intention’ to continue to do research might be too presumptuous a claim to make. By repairing ‘intention’ to ‘ideal’ Rachel implicitly acknowledges the possibility that she might not be able to continue to do research. By using the description ‘ideal’ Rachel makes continuing to do research a desired, but not inevitable, future career activity.

The second point is that Rachel uses the idea of ‘moving into’ teaching or lecturing. This particular form of expression is part of the rhetoric of ‘career.’ This is because an impression of movement, transition or progression is given: career may consist of a progressive movement on the job front, for example (on the ambivalence of academic career and self promotion, see Fairclough, 1995, chapter six; see also Coupland, 2004). Rachel says that her ideal will be to ‘continue to do (0.6) research’ rather than for instance ‘moving into teaching or lecturing’ (lines 6 to 8) and thereby gives the impression that she is preserving the continuity of her career. While moving into teaching or lecturing is not her ideal, Rachel implicitly concedes that she might still make this move, if she cannot attain her ideal. The rhetoric of career is again constituted when Rachel says that her PhD has been part of a ‘progression towards ... an academic career’ (lines 11 to 14). Her use of the word ‘progression’ gives the sense of movement or development. Earlier in the interview, Rachel said ‘I did know that I wanted to carry on in a research (. ) academic career and that to do that I would need a PhD.’ In this earlier utterance, the PhD is implied to be a kind of passport to a research academic career.
Similar ‘career’ identity work can be appreciated in the utterance ‘and it has developed me (0.9) erh (. ) the- yknow uh aspects of me towards meeting that career as well I think (yeah) or is doing so’ (lines 15 to 16). Here, Rachel talks about her self development during the period of her doctorate. There is some delicate work going on during this utterance. Firstly, there is the repair from the PhD having developed Rachel (‘and it has developed me’) to it having developed aspects of her (‘uh aspects of me’) towards meeting an academic career. By correcting the claim that the PhD has developed her, and claiming that it has developed ‘aspects’ of her, Rachel draws away from being too presumptuous about her progression along the academic career path. Secondly, there is the addition of ‘or is doing so’ at the end of the utterance. This might be related to the fact that Rachel had not yet completed her thesis, and therefore is having difficulty speaking of it in the past tense, as though she has completed it already (‘it has developed me’). The addition of ‘or is doing so’ situates the self-development in the present; the PhD is in the process of developing her towards meeting the academic career.

It can briefly be noted that Rachel says ‘that career’ rather than ‘a career’ (line 16). At this moment, she is speaking about ‘meeting’ a specific career, an academic career, rather than a career per se. Rachel gives the impression that she is in the process of meeting a new career, and making a transition from her earlier career as a practising physiotherapist, and not meeting her first career. After all, earlier in the interview, Rachel said that the fellowship which funded her PhD was designed for clinicians who wanted to ‘go into’ research.

Steven goes on to ask Rachel ‘do you feel yourself (. ) becoming an academic or you think you already are one or’ (lines 18 to 19). This particular wording of the academic question differs markedly from the questions which were asked of Ben and Fiona. Steven does not ask Rachel whether she would ‘consider’ herself an academic, for example. Instead, he asks if Rachel ‘feels’ herself ‘becoming’ an academic, or if she ‘thinks’ she already ‘is’ one. A distinction between ‘becoming’ an academic and ‘being’ an academic is constructed. Steven implies that Rachel might not be an academic yet. The inclusion of the word ‘already’ is significant in the sense that it might be premature for Rachel to think of herself as an academic yet, at this moment in her ‘career.’ By phrasing the questions in the particular way that he does, Steven strongly implies that Rachel is not an academic, but that
nevertheless she might well feel, or think herself to be one, or at least becoming one.

The question of whether Rachel feels herself becoming an academic seems to come straight out of what she said previously about her career self-development. Rachel said that her PhD has developed her, or aspects of her, towards meeting an academic career, or that it is doing so (lines 14 to 16). This kind of self-development is implicitly picked up by Steven when he asks her whether she feels herself ‘becoming’ an academic. The implication is similar to the rhetoric of substance which Kenneth Burke (1969) has written about. Burke argues that it is more accurate to say that something is not the case, rather than to say that something is substantially the case. He writes that ‘one may say “it is substantially true” precisely at a time when on the basis of the evidence, it would be much more accurate to say, “it is not true”’ (p. 52; emphasis in original). From this perspective, to be ‘becoming an academic’ is not to be an academic at all.

Although Rachel is not asked whether she ‘would consider’ herself as an academic, as some of the other respondents were asked, she nevertheless goes on to give an answer which seems to suggest that she is answering such a question. Rachel says ‘YEAH I would regard myself’ and uses the word ‘would’ and ‘regard’ as though they were the words of the question. Rachel does not only say that she ‘regards’ herself as an academic, but gives a conditional rendition of saying that she ‘would.’ As mentioned earlier, however, regarding oneself as an academic is different from making a claim to actually being an academic.

Rachel says that she would regard herself as a ‘junior academic’ and thereby gives a qualified version of the identity category ‘academic.’ This provisioning of the category ‘junior academic’ works to solve the problem of claiming too much or too little of an academic identity. The addition of the word ‘junior’ works in a mitigatory sense to limit the extent to which Rachel regards herself as an ‘academic.’ Rachel is not considering herself as an ‘academic’ but rather is claiming the somewhat lower status position of ‘junior academic.’ She thereby gives the impression of being ‘on the way’ to being an academic; she is becoming an academic. However, even her claiming of this lower status position is hedged and qualified. Rachel says that she would regard herself as a ‘sort’ve wha- as a probably as a junior academic’ (lines 21 – 22). She does not straightforwardly claim the identity of junior academic for herself without expressing some caution.
The words ‘sort’ve’ and ‘probably,’ as well as the false starts, give the impression of hedging, mitigation and possibly unease.

Why does Rachel hedge her answer in this way? There are several possibilities. Firstly, Rachel could be displaying a reluctance to make her identity claim in too strong or certain a manner. If she had been more direct, she might have given the impression that she was conceited or boastful. Secondly, the identity ‘junior academic’ is a not a standard category. By hedging, Rachel could be showing that this category is unconventional, such that she cannot just give it straightforwardly. Thirdly, the hedging and mitigation could be associated with the status associated with the category ‘junior academic.’ As she makes her identity claim, Rachel is also claiming a particular status. The words ‘sort’ve’ and ‘probably’ may work to curtail some of the status implications of her claiming to be a junior academic.

Rachel explains her use of the ‘junior academic’ identity by saying that she is ‘not highly published’ (line 23). Rachel’s use of publishing as a criteria for being an academic fits in with what she said earlier about her ‘research’ career. Her ideal was to continue to do research, rather than moving into teaching or lecturing. By saying that she is not ‘highly’ published Rachel suggests that she is published, but that she has not published enough for her to be a proper academic. Indeed, she goes on to say that she has ‘published from the trial’ but that she hasn’t ‘published from this yet’ (‘the trial’ being her previous research, and ‘this’ being her doctoral thesis; lines 23 to 24). Rachel’s argument seems to be that she has not published enough in terms of quantity.

Rachel uses an absence to justify her claim of being a ‘junior’ academic, for not being highly published is a negative criterion. She implies that if this lack was corrected, and if she were highly published, then she might consider herself to be an ‘academic’ rather than a ‘junior’ academic. By saying that she hasn’t published from her thesis ‘yet’ (line 24) Rachel suggests that she expects to publish from her thesis at some point in the future. Furthermore, she implies that when she has published from her thesis, then she will be in a better position to consider herself an academic. By going into a research career, it is likely that Rachel will be highly published, given the passage of time. We will consider the dilemmas of doctoral publishing in more detail in chapter 8.
Rachel says that ‘certainly within- within the physio profession I def- I’m definitely regarded as a- one of the academics’ (lines 25 to 26). In a similar way to how Fiona said that ‘people always say that I’m a natural academic’ (extract 2, line 23), Rachel brings the opinions of others onboard to credential herself as an academic. She uses the words ‘certainly’ and ‘definitely’ to make a strong case for her being regarded as ‘one of the academics’ within the physio profession.

After giving her justificatory warrants, Rachel returns to the business of answering the academic question. At the end of this sequence, Rachel says ‘I desire to be and I guess in some ways I’d say that I am’ (lines 27 to 28). This answer shows that the topic of her academic identity is not clear-cut or straightforward. For example, her reply contains hedging (‘I guess’) and qualification (‘in some ways’). In a similar way to how Ben said ‘I probably am’ at the end of his answer to the academic question, Rachel finishes with ‘I am’ and thereby upgrades her initial claim of regarding herself as a junior academic. It can be noted that, at this point, Rachel does not specify whether she is an ‘academic’ proper or a ‘junior academic.’

By attempting to claim academic identities for themselves, all of the respondents in this chapter suggested that they wanted to be academics. Although it was only Rachel who professed a desire to be an academic, Ben and Fiona, through their conversational actions, both gave the impression that they wanted to be academics. However, sometimes the language of desire is not so straightforward. On occasion doctoral students have difficulty speaking about who they are, and who they want to be. There are dilemmatic aspects of claiming an academic identity, involving feelings of ambivalence, which will consider in the following chapter.
Chapter Seven – Ideological Dilemmas of Claiming an Academic Identity

In the previous chapter we analysed the ways in which doctoral students warranted themselves as academics. The particular focus was with those respondents who were categorised in the content analysis as replying ‘yes’ to the academic question. In the present chapter, we will be concerned with the ambivalent or dilemmatic aspects of claiming academic identities. The chapter concerns the case of ‘Will’ who was categorised in the content analysis as saying ‘Yes and No’ in response to his academic question. Whereas the previous chapter concerned relatively straightforward cases of those respondents who ‘would’ consider themselves academics, this chapter concerns more complicated issues, surrounding ambivalence of desire, and dilemmas of an ideological nature, which can surround the claiming of an academic identity for doctoral postgraduates and young lecturers.

‘I don’t want to be all career-ey’: The case of Will

‘Will’ is a 34 year old Senior Lecturer in Psychology at a University College in the United Kingdom. He started his lectureship in January 1998, which was around three and half years prior to the interview. He was initially employed as a Lecturer, and then in 1999, after 18 months, a Senior Lecturer position came up, which he applied for and got. Will pointed out that this was his first ‘proper job,’ his ‘first full-time job in higher education.’ Will was not registered as a doctoral postgraduate at his current institution. He started his PhD at another institution, around two years prior to taking up his lectureship. Before taking up his doctorate, he did an undergraduate degree, and taught in Further Education for around six years. At this time he also studied part-time for a Masters degree. The interview was carried out in the Summer of 2001, and Will was hoping to submit his thesis in the Autumn, and to have his viva before Christmas. The PhD will have taken him around six years to complete.

Like Ben and Rachel, Will used the word ‘career’ in his interview, without being asked about it by Steven. However, whereas both Ben and Rachel used the term ‘career’ and implicitly endorsed career rhetoric in their talk, Will displayed
his reluctance about using such language. Early on in the interview, in the context of answering a question about the backgrounds of the postgraduates in his department, Will said ‘I mean my career (.) has been a bit odd (.) really in lots of ways’ (emphasis his own). He did his first degree, then trained to be a teacher, then did a part-time Masters whilst teaching in Further Education, before starting his PhD. When he made this comment, Will distanced himself from the word ‘career’ by signing quotation marks with his hands as he said the word. By putting the word in quotes, Will gave a subtle indication that he was reluctant to fully endorse the term, and to use it without qualification.

Later on in the interview, Will said ‘I’m not really into my career erm it’s not a term I ever really use’ (emphasis his own) although, ironically, this was the second time that he used the term. Will said that he preferred to talk of having a ‘job of work’ rather than a ‘career.’ He said that his approach might be considered ‘eclectic’ and that he was a ‘jack of all trades.’ When I asked him why he was cautious about using the word ‘career’ Will said that he is not really very ambitious. He went on to say that ‘career always implies a next step’ (emphasis his own) and that he doesn’t have any desires to advance himself. He also said that he had fallen into a lot of things he’s fallen into, and that ‘I don’t want to be all kind of career-ey.’ Although he did not talk about career in the same way as Ben and Rachel did, Will nevertheless used the language of career when he talked. The difference is that Will attempted to distance himself from this language. These early indications of the dilemmas of work and career within academia are expanded upon in Will’s reply to the academic question, which we will turn to presently.

Extract

1 Steven so would you consider yourself an academic?
2 Will ((sucks through teeth and sighs for 5 seconds))
3 ((7.7 seconds of silence and tutting))
4 wl be a big pause there Hn- in-in your transcript isn’t there gHn
5 Steven [uhHUUHUAHAHHU Huh Huh ]
6 Will [he said HUUGE HUUGE SIGH TEN SECONDS] OFF
Steve

Will

Steve

Will

Steve

Will

Steve

Will

Steven

Will

Steven

Will

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Will

Steven

Will

Steven
Steven: I’m an a- of course I’m an academic (yeah) but it’s probably not a g- it’s not a position I feel wholly comfortable with. An a there is a huge snob value in the PhD non-PhD thing (yeah) d’you know what I mean and I’m acutely aware I mean there is some pressure (. ) it’s fairly subtle here to be fair but there is some pressure that ‘for God’s sake (. ) when are you going to get this kind’ve PHHD that we thought you were gonna have (yeah) pretty much as soon as you kind of arrived in ni- January nineteen ninety eight’ which is (. ) fair enough (yeah) d-d-d’you know what I mean to a certain extent but there is this huge schism I think between the PhD (yeah) and and the lecturer who doesn’t have a PhD (mmmm) for all that you might have a lot of teaching experience or you might have published quite a few things or you might be in the RAE (. ) it’s it’s still not seen as as quite good enough as as if you haven’t got the- if you haven’t kinda got the thesis (yeah) ermmm (. ) SO ai I spose a- I feel wary of styling myself as an academic before that actual time (yeah) ermmm but my hunch is that even- I mn hopefully- once I’ve got the PhD I probably still won’t feel (. ) that academic is is the right (. ) i- is it’s not the way I would label myself (yeah) if that makes sense (yeah) errrrm (. ) yeah iiiii I think it’s unlikely to be- ISA I’m sure I’ll be ones who will not use my (. ) (mmmm) you know I’m not gonna have all my kinda credit cards changed to

[Doctor d- d’you know what I mean ermmm (. )]

Steven: [yeah HHHHMMHHMMHHHH huhuhuhuh]

Will: and that kind’ve id if people want to that’s fine but ith- the- that’s not the way (yeah) you know w- (. ) I’ll use it in a work sense but that-that-that’s the only place (yeah) that I kind’ve- that I would kind’ve- that I will kind’ve use it (yeah) so you know I’m not that into the status of- (. )

Steven: [yeah ]
Will (I see) of that and that’s partly cos I know the process is so hit and miss (mmmm) (. .) you know the- the people that do deserve doctorates don’t- sometimes don’t get them the people that don’t deserve them sometimes do (yeah) and the (1.6) teHHrrible lack of reliability (mmmm) within the whole process (yeah) eerrmm (. .) I mean is absolutely sh- it’s aHHb[ssolutely shocking [so you know I mean I I I- I might get my doctorate but really if I’d got a different (0.7) panel (yeah) they might have said ‘this is just terrible’ (yeah) equally I might fail and somebody else might say ‘wy- you know this is great’ (yeah) d’you know what I mean (yeah) so errrm I’m cautious (yeah) really (yeah) cautious about the whole thing (yeah) really (yeah)

Out of all the respondents, Will displayed the most difficulty with the academic question, both in terms of his initial response (lines 2 to 13), and his subsequent discussion throughout the remainder of his answer (lines 14 to 86). Listening to the interview as a whole, it is noticeable how much the flow of the interaction is disrupted, as soon as Will is asked the academic question. The relative ease with which Will answered the other interview questions was not evidenced in his reply to this particular question. The interview seemed to come to an abrupt halt when the question is asked.

This kind of change is difficult to capture in a written transcript. Initially, I transcribed this sequence phonetically, according to the Jefferson (1984a) system. This was partly to give the reader an idea of how Will initially responded to the question ‘would you consider yourself an academic?’ (see especially lines 2 and 3). However, I found this transcript to be too difficult to read, and it seemed to obscure the overall pattern of argument during the sequence. The sequence was therefore retranscribed in such a way as to strike a balance between the content of what is said and how this was said.

As well as his initial difficulty, Will’s explanation of his reply to the question is both contemplative and dilemmatic. We will find that, when it comes to the issue of his academic identity, nothing seems to be straightforward. As the
transcript suggests, Will took longer than any of the other participants to answer the academic question. However, it is important to note at the outset that the analysis will not be concerned with Will’s entire answer. Rather we will focus on some of the rhetorical and ideological features of his answer, and how these features relate to, and expand upon, some of the themes of the previous chapter.

**The big pause in my transcript**

When he is asked the academic question, Will displays an initial difficulty (lines 2 to 3). First he sucks in through his teeth. Then he lets out a sigh. This is followed by silence, which is interspersed with tutting sounds. Will seems to be displaying a reluctance or discomfort about answering the question (Pomerantz, 1984, p. 72; Jefferson, 1989). After showing this difficulty, he says ‘wl be a big pause there Hn- in-in your transcript isn’t there gHn’ (line 4) and thereby makes a reflexive meta move. Herbert Simons (1994) has written that a ‘communication is reflexive when it makes prior communications the subject of communication’ (p. 470). Will’s meta move is reflexive in the sense that he brings attention to how his response to the academic question is likely to be represented in Steven’s transcript. He is humorously reflecting upon his ‘big pause’ and making fun of how this will impact upon the transcription process. Will reflexively makes this prior communicational act of ‘responding to the question’ a subject of his communication.

Will goes meta on his answer and simultaneously brings attention to his difficulty in answering. In this sense his meta movement can be understood as an escape strategy (Simons, 1994). Will might be attempting to escape from the difficulty he was experiencing in answering the question straightforwardly, and in the terms of the question. However, going meta has the potential to impede the flow of an interaction (Simons, 1989). A meta mover can give the impression that they are being impolite, disruptive or evasive. For example, by going meta, a person can put off answering the question they have been asked. Will is initiating an ‘insertion sequence’ at this moment, as Ben did in chapter six, which is ‘a spate of interaction which is nested in or embedded in an overarching sequential framework’ (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998, p. 180). By initiating this insertion sequence, Will risks disrupting the question-answer sequence, and thereby
avoiding the question. However, in the present extract, Will does not put off answering the academic question so much as bring attention to his answer in the process of answering. The meta movement is part of the answer to the academic question, and deals with the issue of answering the question itself. Will is bringing attention, in an indirect manner, to how his answer was said.

By saying that there will be a ‘big pause’ in Steven’s transcript, Will implies that he is responsible for that pause. This is despite the fact that no ‘big pause’ actually took place. Rather, a sigh, and silence interspersed with tutting actually took place (lines 2 to 3). Ironically, it might be the case that Will went meta in order to avoid leaving a ‘big pause.’ After all, by saying that there will be a ‘big pause’ Will does not leave a big pause. It can sometimes be difficult to leave long silences in ordinary conversation (Jefferson, 1989) and Will’s meta movement might work to stop him from experiencing serious difficulty with the academic question.

By laughing twice as he makes the comment about the big pause, Will signals that this is a humorous meta move. The particles ‘Hn’ and ‘gHn’ represent interpolated laughter within the utterance, and work to give the impression that Will is entering the realm of humour (Mulkay, 1988; Jefferson, 1985). This is the first time that laughter appears in the sequence. By laughing as he makes his meta move, Will gives the impression that what he is saying should not be taken entirely seriously. The laughter works to soften the meta movement and gives the impression that the comment is meant humorously. Humour can work to repair a potentially embarrassing situation (Billig, 2001), such as being unable to answer an interview question in an appropriately straightforward way. The laughed ‘gHn’ at the end of the utterance, after the tag question ‘isn’t there,’ works as an invitation for Steven to laugh (Jefferson, 1979). Steven picks up on the humorous nature of what Will has said by laughing loudly and emphatically (line 5).

By talking about the big pause in Steven’s ‘transcript’ Will does some implicit identity work. Like Ben in the previous chapter, Will displays his academic identity. He gives the impression that he is knowledgeable about qualitative and/or discursive research, that his interview is being recorded, and also that it will be transcribed at a later date (cf. Speer and Hutchby, 2003a). By saying ‘your transcript’ Will positions Steven as the researcher, and as the one for whom the transcript has significance. He implies that Steven does not want a ‘big
pause’ in his transcript. In fact, it might be something annoying and problematic for him as the researcher, like a potential ‘gap’ in the data. After all, how much can one say about a big pause?

As Steven laughs (line 5), Will says ‘he said HUUGE HUUGE SIGH TEN SECONDS OFF’ (line 6). This is a sequence of direct reported speech, in which Will jokingly imagines how Steven will transcribe Will’s initial response to the question (on reported speech, see Antaki and Leudar, 2001; Buttny, 1998; Voloshinov, 1978). The previous utterance about the ‘big pause in your transcript’ sets up this subsequent utterance about the ‘huge, huge sigh’ to be heard as though it is Steven doing his transcribing. By saying ‘he said’ Will gives the impression that Steven is speaking or writing. The pronoun ‘he’ in this context indexically refers to Will himself as the interviewee, the subject whose words are being transcribed.

Paradoxically, the words which Steven is supposedly saying (‘HUUGE HUUGE SIGH TEN SECONDS OFF’) are designed in such a way as to capture what Will himself has just said. It is almost as if Will is doing his own jokey transcription of his words, but using the imaginary voice of Steven as a mouthpiece. The expression ‘HUUGE HUUGE SIGH’ is a characterisation of how Will responded to the question. In itself a ‘sigh’ is suggestive of trouble because a person may ‘sigh’ to give the impression that they are experiencing emotional difficulty with something. They can be displaying exasperation, for example. By loudly stressing ‘HUUGE HUUGE SIGH’ Will emphasises the enormity of the sigh and implies that it is somewhat troublesome. The hugeness or extremity of the sigh is suggestive of its problematic nature (Pomerantz, 1986). Will reflexively brings attention to the difficulty he was having with the question and characterises it as an extreme form of difficulty, albeit in a humorous, mocking kind of way. The impression of humorous mockery comes about because Will is imaginatively voicing Steven doing the transcription of Will’s interview, but while he is doing the interview itself. However, it is a moot point whether Will is mocking himself or Steven at this moment.

The description ‘TEN SECONDS OFF’ is Will’s jokey attempt to measure how much time he spent mulling over the question. Compared to the ‘big pause’ in the transcript, ‘ten seconds’ gives the impression of a specific, timed measurement. Indeed, it is the kind of measurement which might appear in a
transcript. By saying ‘ten seconds,’ rather than say ‘one second,’ Will implies that this is more than a reasonable amount of time to hesitate over an interview question. The value of ‘ten’ seconds is ten times the standard maximum of one second, which is the approximate value Jefferson (1989) has proposed regulates ordinary conversation, although Will might not have been aware of this at the time.

Michael Mulkay (1988) has shown that people can move between humorous and serious realms in conversation in both subtle and ambiguous ways. When he says ‘gaah eerrmm’ (line 8), Will is signalling a return to seriousness. He is implying that his humorous meta move is over, and that he is returning to the serious business of answering a question, which he is having serious difficulty with. Steven’s laughter comes to an end at this point (line 9) and he does not laugh again until some time later (line 25).

Yes and no

When it comes to Will’s initial reply to the academic question, the transcript tells a more complicated story than did the content analysis. In the content analysis, Will was categorised as responding with ‘Yes and No.’ The impression was given that he gave this as a straightforward, self-contained answer to the question. However, when we look at lines 10 to 13 of the extract, we find that matters are not so straightforward. Before looking closely at the specific character of Will’s reply, and its subsequent revisioning, we will consider the conversational structure of the first part of the sequence, and how this relates to the academic question itself.

The initial difficulty which Will displays when he is asked the academic question (lines 2 to 3), along with his meta movement (lines 4 and 6) constitute what conversation analysts have called a ‘dispreferred turn format’ (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998, p. 45). The sighing, tutting and pausing can be understood as ‘hesitating prefaces’ or ‘dispreference markers’ (Pomerantz, 1984). It has been noted that ‘preferred actions are characteristically performed straightforwardly and without delay, while dispreferred actions are delayed, qualified and accounted for’ (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998, p. 45). So, at this early point in the sequence.
Will might be giving indications of his dispreference (for more on preference and dispreference, see Sacks, 1987).

But what is Will showing his dispreference for? One possibility is that he is preparing to signal his disagreement with the academic question. The hesitation ‘may signal potential disagreement’ (Pomerantz, 1984, p. 77) with the idea that he would consider himself an academic. ‘Incorporating delay devices constitutes a typical turn shape for disagreements when agreements are invited’ (p. 70). Relatedly, Davidson (1984) has shown that, by staying silent in response to a proposal, a person can be suggesting that they are about to reject that proposal. To understand the dispreference in this particular sequence, we need to look at the academic question, and then at the reply which Will gives in response to that question.

The asking of a question normatively demands that an answer is given in reply (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973), and the way in which a question is phrased can give important clues about what is expected or not expected as an appropriate kind of answer (Sacks, 1987; Schegloff, 1988). Potter and Wetherell (1987) point out that ‘the preferred response to questions is an expected answer while the dispreferred response is a non-answer or unexpected answer’ (p. 83). But what, in this context, counts as an unexpected answer to the academic question? Potter and Wetherell go on to describe an expected answer as ‘an answer related closely to the possibilities raised in the question’ (p. 84). By asking the question ‘would you consider yourself an academic?’ Steven makes an assumption that Will will either consider himself an academic or that they he will not. The question seems to be designed in order to prefer yes or no type responses. Respondents are not being asked to specify ‘how much’ or ‘to what degree’ they consider themselves to be academics, for example, which would have allowed them to both agree and disagree with the question. Rather, as it stands, this particular academic question seems to invite agreement or disagreement.

Will’s initial reply, which was categorised as ‘Yes and No’ in the content analysis, actually reads as ‘I spose yes and- iwthe here we go YES and no yayyyyyes and no-’ (lines 10 to 11; emphasis his own). Will’s reply is both long and subtly accentuated. He actually repeats his ‘yes and no’ answer three times, although each rendition is subtly different. The first reply is qualified but unfinished (‘I spose yes and-’); by saying ‘I spose’ Will shows caution about
giving his answer. Indeed, when he begins to give his answer, he stops and cuts himself short, saying ‘yes and- iwthe here we go.’ Will does not complete his initial rendition of the ‘yes and no’ answer, but instead comes in with ‘iwthe here we go.’ The utterance ‘here we go’ is not Will signalling that he is about to confidently ‘go ahead’ with his answer. Rather, the utterance is a reflexive action, in the sense that Will is casting an evaluative judgement over the answer he is in the process of giving. He implies that his ‘yes and no’ answer is typical, conventional or predictable. By saying ‘here we go,’ and by putting emphasis on the word ‘go,’ Will suggests that he is giving an expected answer, and one that is ‘on the fence.’ So, at this moment, Will is reflecting upon his identity claim, and this reflection is also itself part of his identity claim. The utterance is therefore another subtle example of a reflexivity of the self, similar to that of Fiona’s reply in the previous chapter.

Will’s second reply to the academic question is complete, and includes a loud and emphatic ‘yes’ (‘YES and no’). By emphasising the word ‘yes’ in this way, Will might be heard as suggesting that he is replying with ‘more yes’ than no. His subsequent repetition, and then revisioning of his answer (‘I’m putting more no than yes,’ lines 11 to 12), might be doing repair work, which functions to counter this interpretation.

Will’s third repetition is said awkwardly and is abruptly cut off at the end (‘yayyyyes and no-’). It is as if, with this third and final repetition of the ‘yes and no’ answer, that Will is again displaying the dispreferred nature of his reply. Indeed, the abrupt cutting off at the end of ‘no-’ is subsequently followed by Will revising or repairing his ‘yes and no’ answer. He comes in with ‘GENERALLY NO I’m putting more no than yes’ (lines 11 to 12). By saying ‘GENERALLY NO’ Will changes his answer, and signals his general disagreement with the proposition of the question. Whereas by saying ‘yes and no’ Will was expressing both agreement and disagreement with the question, by saying ‘GENERALLY NO’ he shows that he is coming down more on the ‘no’ than the ‘yes’ side. However, by saying ‘generally’ no, Will is still implicitly conceding that he is saying ‘partially yes.’ Whilst he has not come down from the fence completely, he has nevertheless slid down into the ‘no’ garden, whilst keeping one of his hands in the ‘yes’ garden. It can be noted that the answer ‘generally no’ has a rhetorical advantage, which is similar to the ‘rhetoric of substance’ which Kenneth Burke (1969) has described:
What handier linguistic resource could a rhetorician want than an ambiguity whereby he can say "The state of affairs is substantially such-and-such," instead of having to say "The state of affairs *is and/or is not* such-and-such"? (p. 52; emphasis in original).

When he gives the revised version of his answer ('I'm putting more no than yes'), Will subtly indicates that he is participating in a social science research interview. By saying that he is 'putting' more no than yes, Will gives the impression that he is filling out a survey questionnaire for Steven. The claim of 'putting more no than yes' is an observational way of talking, as though Will is observing himself giving his answer to the question. However, the claim is itself part of the answer to the academic question, and therefore constitutive of Will's construction of self. It is an act of self-monitoring which is part of Will's identity construction, and is therefore another example of self-reflexivity.

Will talks as if he is writing his answer down on a Likert (1932/1970) style response scale. The imagined questionnaire might pose the question 'Would you consider yourself an academic?' and then provide a selection of possible answers, ranging from 'Yes, completely' to 'No, not at all.' By saying that he is 'putting more no than yes' Will seems to be indicating his preference for an answer which is closer to 'No, not at all' than 'Yes, completely.' But, as was the case with his 'generally no' reply, Will is implicitly conceding that he is putting some 'yes.' He is not saying 'No, not at all' or 'Absolutely not' but rather is keeping open the possibility that he might still consider himself an academic. He is putting 'more no than yes.'

By prefacing his reply with markers of dispreference (lines 2 to 8), and by repeating and revising his initial 'yes and no' answer, Will implies that a 'yes and no' answer is a dispreferred kind of answer. In this particular context, a dispreferred answer to the academic question is an answer which expresses both agreement *and* disagreement, or acceptance *and* rejection. Will gives the impression that the preferred form of answer to the academic question is one which expresses either 'yes' or 'no' — like the answers of Ben, Fiona and Rachel — rather than both 'yes and no.'

The final part of Will's initial answer to the question comes when he says 'I wouldn't tend to position myself as a as an academic' (lines 12 to 13). By saying
that he ‘wouldn’t tend’ to position himself as an academic, Will disclaims an academic identity. However, he does not dismiss this identity entirely. While he might not ‘tend’ to position himself as an academic now, he might ‘tend’ towards doing such a thing some time in the future. After all, tendencies have the potential to be fleeting, and change over the course of time. Also, to ‘position’ oneself as a particular kind of person implies a public dimension. Will could be putting himself on show, in a visible sense, by positioning himself as an academic. By claiming that he wouldn’t tend to position himself as an academic, Will could be showing his reluctance to display his academic identity publicly to other people. (This also relates to Fiona’s comments on the academic ‘label’).

In summary, Will gives the impression that the academic question is a question for which it is difficult to provide a simple and straightforward answer. His dispreference seems to be associated with being able to give an appropriate kind of answer, such as one which is straightforwardly ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ Even though Will revises his initial ‘yes and no’ answer to an answer which is generally ‘no,’ he leaves open the possibility that he might still consider himself an academic (for similar conversation analyses of troubled identities, see Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995, chapter 5).

The evidence against: ideas and ideals of teaching

By changing his answer from ‘yes and no’ to ‘GENERALLY NO I’m putting more no than yes’ Will changes the order in which he will justify his answer. He proceeds to justify why he is saying generally no first, before going on to justify his partial or implicit yes. In this section, we will consider the evidence against the idea that Will would consider himself an academic.

Will’s argument for not considering himself an academic concerns the teaching that he does as part of his job. He says that, within his job now, there is ‘a lot of teaching’ (lines 14 to 15). By saying that there is ‘a lot’ of teaching, Will suggests that there is a problem with the amount of teaching that he has, rather than the level of the teaching. It might be that there is too much teaching in his job. Furthermore, by choosing the word ‘teaching’ rather than for example ‘lecturing,’ and by putting emphasis on the word ‘teaching,’ Will subtly suggests that the level of the teaching is also itself something of a problem. Indeed, he goes
on to say that ‘really a lot of it isn’t that different from (. ) what I t- went from teaching A-Level’ (lines 16 to 17), and brings attention explicitly to the level of the teaching that he does. Will is suggesting that ‘a lot’ of the ‘lot of teaching’ is similar to the teaching he did as an A-Level teacher. Will is suggesting that both the amount and the level of the teaching that he does in academia make it difficult for him to consider himself as an academic, and therefore that he resembles an A-Level teacher, more than he does an academic.

Will goes on to say that ‘yes the level is higher th- it’s theoretically more complex’ (lines 17 to 18) and concedes that there may be points of difference between his A-Level teaching and his university teaching. After making this concession, Will comes in with ‘but’ and says ‘I spose I had this idea of academia (. ) or academe’ (lines 18 to 19). By following the concession with ‘but’ Will implies that he is introducing his ‘idea of academia’ as a justification for him not considering himself an academic. He is suggesting that his ‘idea’ contradicts the concession about the level and theoretical complexity of his university teaching, and that it works as evidence against him being an academic (for more on the analysis of concessions, see Antaki and Wetherell, 1999).

By saying that he ‘had’ this idea of academia, Will suggests that he used to have this idea in the past, but that he does not necessarily have this idea any more. The idea is resigned to his past self; he implies that his present self no longer shares this idea. Will continues to use the past tense as he describes the idea he once had (‘it was (. ) me,’ line 19; for more on tense variation and narrative, see Schiffrin, 1981). It is also worth noting at this point the serious way in which Will’s idea is initially introduced. There is no laughter or sign of irony. The only distancing involved is the use of the past tense, and the expression of ‘I spose.’ By saying ‘I spose I had this idea of academia’ Will gives a sense of reluctance and/or caution about introducing his idea. There is another subtle feature of the way in which the idea is introduced. Will makes a change from the Latin ‘academia’ to the Greek ‘academe.’ This subtle change of register might be an early indication that the ‘idea’ Will had was archaic and/or pretentious in nature. However, there is no sign of jokey irony or distancing when he says ‘academia (. ) or academe,’ even though these terms are themselves archaic. Will speaks as though he is either making a repair, or giving the alternative and equivalent category of ‘academe.’
Will begins to explain the idea he had about academia/academe, saying ‘it was (...) me sitting in my office sucking on a pipe even though I don’t smoke’ (lines 19 to 20). It is worth thinking about this initial description of the ‘idea’ in some detail, because some of the themes it raises are developed throughout the rest of this chapter. Will’s description begins superficially in the sense that he is painting a picture of his appearance as an academic. He was sitting in his office, sucking on a pipe. But what is the significance of this pipe smoking? In their paper ‘The PhD and the Autonomous Self,’ Johnson, Lee and Green (2000) make the argument that such images are essential components of aspiring academics’ fantasies about academia:

The ‘dreaming spires’ of the ancient university, the lure of just the name ‘Oxford’, or the image of the scholar in ‘his’ library, all represent continuing group fantasies or social utopias for the aspiring academic, just as the imagined, longed for, community of scholars continues to be a reference point which academics frequently invoke as representing the ‘real university’ of ‘the past’. These fantasies are productive and sustaining of the desire to be a certain figure, the independent scholar. The body of the scholar that frequents these spaces is often the tweed-coated figure conjured up by Riemer’s library full of leather-bound tomes (and echoed by many of the women and men who have participated in this and our earlier research). Of course, it is a masculine figure, even though women have managed throughout the history of the PhD to imagine themselves into these spaces, and hence to submit themselves to the pedagogical practices that both rely on and sustain these practices (p. 139).

So the image of Will sucking on a pipe is not a mere narrative detail, giving a sense of realism to his idea. It has a deeper, psychological and historical significance. For instance, the ‘pipe’ which Will is sucking on works metonymically in this context, as a single object standing in for something much broader. Like the dreaming spires and the leather-bound tomes, it is part of a romantic version of academic history. It represents a mythical version of the privileged university of the past. The idea of Will sitting in his office sucking on a pipe might therefore be part of a ‘fantasy’ or ‘social utopia’ about academia/academe. The image conjures up a particular mood or sensibility, which might have once been desirable to this young scholar. The image of the pipe smoking academic is archaic, and as Johnson, Lee and Green suggest, it is also
gendered. (Indeed, there are even phallic connotations to be read from the
description of the pipe smoker, which we shall not go into).

Will is speaking as a present day scholar, recounting an idea he once had
about what academia, or academe, would be like. Paradoxically his idea of the
future is itself an image from the distant past. Will imagines himself as an
outdated, somewhat stereotypical, academic figure. By thinking of himself as a
mythical stereotype, Will strikes a necessary distance between himself and the
figure represented in the idea (on the paradoxes of stereotyping, see Pickering,
2001). When he says that he was sitting in his office, sucking on a pipe, 'even
though I don’t smoke,' Will gives the impression that he is having trouble
imagining himself in this way. He is having difficulty putting himself into the
picture. Indeed, the image comes across as comical, and not to be taken seriously.
The laughed ‘hmhmhm’ by Steven at this moment (line 21) indicates that he is not
taking the comment entirely seriously.

Will’s ‘idea’ does not work straightforwardly as an ‘ideal’ because it is not
implied to be an attainable, or necessarily desirable, idea about
academia/academe. Will switches between the serious realm and the humorous
realm during this sequence (Mulkay, 1988). He veers between taking his idea
seriously, on the one hand, and treating it as something comical, on the other.
Basically, Will displays an ambivalence about how he is relating to his idea. For
instance, when he says that he was ‘with er a little group of three or four students
that had read lots of articles’ (lines 21 to 22) he is giving the impression that he is
being serious. After all, this particular part of the idea is at least feasible. It is
actually possible for a little group of three or four students to have read ‘lots of
articles,’ even though it might be unlikely. The idea is imaginable, realistic and
therefore potentially realisable. That is, unlike the idea of a non-smoker sucking
on a pipe, which is implied to be an undesirable and unattainable idea. Will does
not say that his imaginary students had read ‘a ridiculous number of articles’ for
example. Instead, he implies that they are studious. The rhetorical contrast
between the number of them (‘a little group of three or four’) and the amount of
articles they have read (‘lots of articles’) gives the impression that they are hard-
working and eager about their studies.

However, when Will goes on to say that they were ‘having this kind of ...
desperately pretentious and precious theoretical discussion about something’
(lines 22 to 23) he returns to the mode of humour. Steven starts laughing just as Will says the words ‘desperately pretentious and precious’ (line 25) and this laughter constitutes the humorous and not to be taken seriously character of this part of the idea. By describing something or someone as ‘pretentious’ a person can be making a criticism. For example, in the previous chapter, Fiona said that ‘I think a lot of people think of academics as quite pretentious as well’ (extract 2, lines 38 to 39) and thereby identified some of the critical thoughts that people have about academics. In the present example, Will is mocking the pretension of the theoretical discussion. He is making a jokey criticism of it. Will describes the theoretical discussion as ‘desperately pretentious.’ The word ‘desperately’ is used here to intensify the pretention of the discussion. The discussion is so pretentious that it is comical and/or ridiculous. Will suggests that the characters are intellectually pompous. They are caricatures, acting in an exaggeratedly stereotypical way. And, after all, they are imaginary characters. In this sense, their pretension is not to be taken entirely seriously.

Despite critically mocking his own idea, Will also displays a fondness for the discussants and their activities. They are unselfconsciously partaking in a precious theoretical discussion, blissfully unaware of how desperately pretentious they appear. This impression of fondness might be to do with the fact that, by making fun of his idea, Will is also making fun of himself. After all, Will is a character in this play, and he is also the playwright. He is making a mockery of himself for having such a desperately pretentious idea of academia/academe in the first place.

Soon after describing his ‘idea’ about academia/academe, Will begins to criticise his actual present day job situation. Thus, his ‘idea’ of the past comes to evoke a desirable and attainable ‘ideal’ about what academia/academe should be like. We can begin to appreciate that this is happening when Will says ‘ERM AND you know (. ) I don’t do anything like that at all’ (lines 24 to 26; emphasis his own). Here, Will is making a serious contrast between his past ‘idea’ and what he actually does in his university job. He uses a total case formulation to stress how much his job contrasts with his idea of what once happened in the privileged universities of the past (Pomerantz, 1986). Will says that he doesn’t do ‘anything like that at all’ and pushes the difference between his idea of the past and his job to its limit. This particular total case formulation comes across as a complaint.
Will might be complaining about the total lack of resemblance between his job and his idea. The implication is that Will’s job might have resembled his idea, and that he wanted his job to be like his idea, and represent the reality of past privilege, at least in some regard.

Will goes on to concede a similarity between his idea and his job. He says ‘actually I do- most of my teaching is se- third year or second year’ (lines 27 to 28). Here Will uses the word ‘actually’ and makes a concession which works to contradict his previous total case formulation. Will is suggesting that third and second year undergraduate students – unlike first year undergraduates – might in some way resemble the enthusiastic students he imagined in his idea. Will thereby shows that the total case formulation of him not doing ‘anything’ like his idea ‘at all’ was brittle, and not necessarily to be taken literally (Edwards, 2000). Still, Will is continuing to take his ‘idea’ seriously enough to compare it with his actual university teaching.

After making the concession, Will comes in with ‘BUT’ and returns to the task of contrasting his idea with his job (line 28). The descriptions of Will’s job are rhetorical, in the sense that they work to point out how his ‘idea’ of the past differs to his actual job. Three rhetorical contrasts are made. Firstly, the number of students who attend his seminars is highlighted. Will says that ‘in a seminar group I have twenty students’ (line 29). By emphasising the word ‘twenty’ Will marks their number out as contrastive to the ‘little group of three or four students’ (lines 21 to 22) who were present in his idea. Secondly, the number of articles that his seminar students have read is highlighted. Although there are ‘twenty’ students in his seminars, which is around five times the ‘three or four’ students he had in his ‘idea,’ the number of articles which his seminar students have read have not gone up proportionally. In fact, Will says that ‘I have twenty students who might have read one paper if I’m lucky’ (lines 29 to 30). While the students in his idea had read ‘lots of articles,’ his seminar students ‘might’ have read ‘one paper’ if he’s ‘lucky.’ The implication is that it is unlikely that his seminar students will have read anything at all, and whether they have done any reading comes down to a matter of chance. The impression of student apathy is thereby given (for similar examples of this from the student perspective, see Benwell and Stokoe, 2002). Will’s seminar students are implied to be disinterested in their work. This
contrasts starkly with the enthusiasm of the students in his ‘idea’ who now appear somewhat like ‘ideal’ students.

Thirdly, Will compares what goes on in a seminar to what goes on in a classroom. He says that ‘a seminar isn’t really that different to a lesson ... in school terms’ (lines 31 to 32) and thereby minimises the difference between his university seminars and school lessons. If university seminars resemble school lessons, then Will resembles a school teacher, rather than an academic. Indeed, he goes on to say that he has difficulty, from that point of view, seeing himself as an academic (lines 32 to 34). By making the first two descriptions of his job, about the number of students and their lack of reading, Will constructs the seminar situation in such a way as to suggest that he has no choice about how he teaches. There are too many students, and they lack the enthusiasm to do their reading, and so he has to teach like a school teacher. The focus of criticism in this sequence is the number of students and their activities, rather than Will’s own ability as a teacher.

The answer to the question of whether Will wants academia/academe to resemble his idea seems, ironically, to be ‘Yes and No.’ Initially, he gives the impression that his ‘idea’ is not to be taken seriously. He does this by resigning it to his past self, and by mocking and deriding it for being fanciful and/or naïve. However, Will does not go on to ridicule his idea completely out of hand. When he contrasts his idea with his present day job situation, the mood of argument changes. The rhetoric of the latter part of this sequence is such that his ‘idea’ has to be taken seriously in order for his complaints to work. And as we have seen, his ‘idea’ of the past becomes a serious, desirable, and potentially attainable ‘ideal’ of what academia/academe should be like. In this sense, we can appreciate that Will does not present his idea ‘just for laughs.’

The early part of this sequence has the feel of a ‘laughing about it later’ episode (Billig, 2001). Will is jokingly reflecting upon past expectations, which turned out to be naïve and misguided. He is making a mockery of both his ‘idea’ and himself. However, this joking around should not necessarily be taken innocently. There is the possibility that Will is remembering past hopes which have not come to fruition. And, in talking about the past, Will might be negotiating the vulnerability of a dreamer whose dreams have not come true. (Indeed, this would explain the reluctance with which Will introduced his idea.) Just as Will is
showing a fondness for a particular period of academic history, he is also displaying a fondness for who he used to be. He is reminiscing about a past self who used to have romantic ideas about what the future would hold. The humour and laughter may, in this sense, work to lessen the difficulty of speaking about an abandoned past self whose hopes have been dashed.37

Johnson, Lee and Green (2000) have rightly argued that ‘[u]nderstanding the role of such fantasies is important in explaining the deep investments in, and attachments to, the existing structures and processes of the PhD that prevail in the humanities and social sciences today’ (p. 136). We can appreciate how Will’s idea plays a profound and central role in his account of his identity. The particular stereotype of the pipe smoking academic is so powerful that a non-smoker can find themselves imagining that they are such a figure. However, it is also important to acknowledge how such fantasies of academia/academe can play an ambivalent role in the imaginations of young scholars. We have seen that Will does not want to be the desperately pretentious, pipe smoking academic in any straightforward way. He distances himself from this fantasy, while also at the same time displaying a fondness for it. He suggests that he both does, and does not, want to be the archaic academic figure. And so, whilst Will’s idea plays a crucial role in his account, this role is a dilemmatic one. It is a pivotal part of his construction of an ambivalent, dilemmatic academic identity.

This ambivalence of desire surrounding ideas of academia/academe may well be part of a broader phenomenon. Will presents himself as a critic of the present day academic climate. He makes serious criticisms of the lack of reading the students in his seminars do, and implies that something has gone wrong in the present. But his relationship with the past, including his own past, in which he once held particular ideas, and the mythical academic past, which he invokes, is ambivalent. Whilst Will is a critic of the present, he seems to be ambivalent about the past. In a paradoxical sense, Will is reminiscing nostalgically about a past of which he was never a part. But it is not so straightforward as him looking back on an academic past and wishing that the present would resemble it. Will is not

37 The humour may also play an interactional role, in the sense that it eases the difficulty of telling a trouble to Steven, as the interviewer, and of Steven receiving this troubles telling (see Jefferson, 1984b, 1988).
arguing for a straightforward return to past traditions and values, because he mocks those traditions and values as he introduces them.  

The evidence in favour: ‘of course I’m an academic’

When Will says ‘so I have difficulty from that point of view (mmm) seeing myself as an academic’ (lines 32 to 34) he is drawing a conclusion, based upon what he has just said. He is returning to the task of answering the academic question, and staying within the remit of that question. The issue is whether Will can ‘see’ himself as an academic or not, and not whether he actually ‘is’ one. By making this conclusion, Will suggests that his teaching makes it difficult for him to see himself as an academic. However, by saying that he has difficulty ‘from that point of view’ Will suggests that there might be other ‘points of view’ from which he can more easily see himself as an academic. Indeed, he follows his conclusion with ‘having said that’ (line 34) which works rhetorically in a similar way to the word ‘but’ to introduce a contradictory ‘point of view.’ Will proceeds to give evidence which, he suggests, works in favour of him being an academic. It can be noted that none of his reasons ‘for’ being an academic concern students or teaching.

The first evidential warrant that Will provides in favour of him being an academic is the claim that ‘I do (0.8) talk to my colleagues and we bounce ideas around’ (lines 34 to 35). Talking to colleagues and bouncing ideas around are implied to be the kinds of things that academics do. It is interesting that this description lacks the desperate pretension and preciousness of Will’s former ‘idea’ about what academia/academe would be like. His use of the social identity category ‘colleagues’ gives the impression of a business-like relationship, and the bouncing around of ideas comes across as casual and carefree, unlike the pretentious and precious theoretical discussion, which came across as careful, in-depth and extended. When he describes his actual academic activities, then, Will does not imply that he and his colleagues are being ‘desperately pretentious and precious.’

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38 The German philosopher and critic Walter Benjamin (1970/1999, p. 46) displayed a similar ‘peculiar duality’ of wanting to both preserve and destroy past traditions (see also Billig. 1996).
Will carries on giving evidence which, he argues, works in favour of him being an academic. He says ‘and (. ) you know I have continued to do research and I have published things in (. ) yknw peer rate- peer reviewed journals (yeah)’ (lines 35 to 37; emphasis his own). Again, Will is displaying his understanding of what qualifies a person to be an academic. As with Rachel in the previous chapter, he is suggesting that ‘research’ and ‘publishing’ are straightforward and taken for granted signs of academic status. However, Will is initially quite vague about his publishing: he says that he has published ‘things.’ He does not specify precisely how many ‘things’ he has published, although it is implied that he has published more than once. The word ‘things’ is ambiguous as an index of the number of publications which Will has done. On the one hand ‘things’ could mean two, three or four publications and as such may work to cover him for not being particularly prolific. On the other hand, ‘things’ might be working to display modesty and self-effacement. Will might be trying not to boast about his extensive publication history in the presence of Steven, a younger doctoral student.

Just as he is about to say where he has published his ‘things’ Will stumbles. First, he hesitates. Then he says ‘yknw.’ This is then followed by the cut off ‘peer rate-’ which is then quickly repaired with ‘peer reviewed journals.’ Will then finally gets a ‘yeah’ confirmation from Steven (see lines 36 to 37). What is the significance of the cautious and tentative way in which Will identifies the locations of his publications? By specifying that the journals are ‘peer reviewed’ Will brings attention to the quality of the publications he has done. Within academia/academe, the peer review process is said to guarantee the high status of the articles that are selected for publication. Peer reviewed journals are the quality, esteemed journals of academia/academe. This status aspect may explain some of the caution which Will displays. Will implies that he has published in more than one peer reviewed journal. The unfinished ‘peer rate-’ could be a start on ‘peer rated’ although one cannot be sure. We might suggest that there is a risk that Will is understood as boasting about his publishing credentials. After all, he does not give any sign of irony or distancing when he says ‘peer rate- peer reviewed journals.’

Will presents his reasons ‘for’ being an academic in a much more succinct and straightforward manner than he did his reasons ‘against.’ Whereas his discussion of his teaching and his ‘idea’ was qualified and hedged, the evidence
that Will gives in favour of him being an academic has a list-like quality. He talks to his colleagues and they bounce ideas around; he has continued to do research: has has published things in peer reviewed journals. This is similar to how Ben. in the previous chapter, implied that he was a successful researcher, giving the impression that his research activities progressed smoothly and straightforwardly from one to the other (see chapter six, extract 1, lines 10 to 11). Will’s straightforward reeling off of evidence that he ‘is’ an academic works in a similar way, and contrasts with the earlier extended and qualified discussion of him having difficulty seeing himself as an academic. While Will claims that he generally would not consider himself an academic, the way in which he provisions his answer seems to suggest that he is saying the opposite.

After mentioning that he has published things in peer reviewed journals, Will makes a conclusion. He says ‘so from an objective point of view I spose it would be f- (0.6) silly to sorta say well of- you know of co- you know anything but of course I’m an a- of course I’m an academic’ (lines 37 to 40). Will thereby characterises what he has just been saying about bouncing ideas around with his colleagues, researching and publishing as an ‘objective’ point of view. This is an alternative ‘point of view’ to the earlier ‘teaching’ point of view, from which Will was having difficulty seeing himself as an academic (lines 32 to 34). From an objective point of view, he supposes, it would be silly to say anything but ‘of course I’m an academic.’

Earlier on in his answer, Will said that he was putting ‘more no than yes’ in reply to the academic question, and thereby gave more argumentative weight to the ‘no’ side of his answer than to the ‘yes.’ However, when he makes his conclusive remarks, Will aligns the ‘yes’ side of the argument with the ‘objective’ point of view. The objective ‘yes’ point of view is thereby given more rhetorical weight than the subjective ‘no’ point of view. It is also interesting that, while Will implied that his earlier sentiments about teaching were based upon his own subjective personal opinion, his research and publications are, by contrast, placed within the realm of ‘objective’ fact. Publications can be quantified and assessed for their quality, as in the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) for example, and this is part of their status as ‘objective’ markers of academic identity (for more on the rhetoric of fact construction, see Potter, 1996).
The imagined sentiment ‘of course I’m an academic’ connotes a straightforward certainty of being. Of course I’m an academic. Ironically, however, the lead up to the making of this sentiment is anything but certain. Will makes a total of four false starts on his run up: ‘I spose it would be f- (0.6) silly to sorta say well of- you know of co- you know anything but of course I’m an a- of course I’m an academic’ (lines 38 to 40), and after then he contradicts the conclusion that he has just made, saying ‘but it’s probably not a g- it’s not a position I feel wholly comfortable with’ (lines 40 to 41). Will certainly shows his discomfort with the idea of being an academic, both through his false starts, and also by discounting the ‘objective point of view,’ from which he so obviously appears as an academic.

When he says that academic is ‘not a position I feel wholly comfortable with’ Will is using his personal feelings to counter the ‘objective’ idea that he is an academic. While he might be an academic objectively, this does not mean that he feels like an academic, or that he feels comfortable with the position of academic. Will disclaims the academic identity by using his own personal, subjective feelings on the matter. What is implied, however, is that Will could identify himself as an academic, if he really wanted to. It is just that he is not wholly comfortable with that position. Basically, his feelings are getting in the way. However, the use of the word ‘probably’ (line 40), and the idea that Will is not ‘wholly’ comfortable with the position of academic, work to lessen this discomfort. Will is again giving the impression that he is not completely dismissing this identity for himself. There is still a chance that he might feel partially comfortable with the position of academic.

The snobbery of minor differences

We have seen that, in his answer to the academic question, Will introduces several different evidential warrants, which work either to qualify or disqualify him as an academic. These include teaching, researching, and publishing. However, it is not until around halfway through his answer that Will introduces the ‘PhD’ qualification as a warrant to potentially credential him as an academic. He then proceeds to discuss the significance of the doctorate throughout the remainder of his answer. In this section, we will concern ourselves with some of what Will has
to say about the doctoral qualification, before finally commenting on his general situation.

Will makes the comment that 'there is a huge huge snob value in the PhD non-PhD thing' (lines 42 to 43; emphasis his own). The nature and logic of this 'snob value' is an important part of this sequence, so we will begin by considering some of the background assumptions of 'snobbery.' The modern meaning of the word 'snob' can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, to the writings of William Makepeace Thackeray. In the introduction to The Book of Snobs, Sutherland explains that,

In his Punch serial, The Snobs of England, Thackeray sorted out that bundle of characteristics which make up snobbery as we now use the term: arrogant pride in position, pretension to yet higher position, stiff hauteur to inferiors, supple abasement to superiors, obtuse fidelity to the vertical placings of the rank system (Thackeray, 1978, p. 3; emphasis in original).

Essentially, to accuse a person of being a 'snob' is to insult that person. When Will says that there is a 'snob value' in the PhD non-PhD thing, he is making a criticism of that value, and distancing himself from it. After all, snobbishness is 'one of those vices which we can discern in everyone else but never in ourselves' (Orwell, 1937/1989, p. 145). Furthermore, a 'snob' value is not a genuine 'value:' because it is only valuable to a snob. Will is therefore putting a question mark over the value of this 'snob value.'

As Thackeray made clear, snobbery exists within the context of a 'rank system' or social hierarchy, in which people are differentiated from one another, based upon their relative positions in society. Social class membership can, for example, form the basis of 'class snobbery' (see Orwell, 1937/1989, part II). In the present case, the very distinction between the PhD and the non-PhD might be regarded as snobbish. The social hierarchy of academia, and also of the wider society, is such that people are differentiated from one another by their qualifications, diplomas and social titles. The potential problem is that such practices are essentially anti-democratic. They contravene the spirit of equality and egalitarianism which exists within societies imbued with democratic values (see Billig et al., 1988, chapter 5). The 'PhD non-PhD thing' implies a process of
social comparison, in which the person with a doctorate is contrasted with the person who lacks that qualification. While the ‘PhD’ is implied to be complete and whole, the ‘non-PhD’ is lacking and inadequate. Will suggests that the huge, huge snob value is associated with the allegedly high status position of the ‘PhD’ which lies in contrast with the relatively lower status position of the ‘non-PhD.’ By identifying this snob value, then, Will seems to be ‘battling enlightenedly against the irrationality of those who revere status for its own sake’ (ibid., p. 72). He is suggesting that the ‘snob value’ of the PhD non-PhD thing is wrongheaded, and that it should be modified or replaced with some other sort of value system.39

By saying that there is a ‘huuuuge huuuuge snob value’ in the PhD non-PhD thing, Will implies that the snob value has been blown out of all proportion. By repeating the word ‘huuuuge’ and by stressing its vowels, he suggests that the PhD non-PhD snob value is enormous, and well beyond the realm of reason. By bringing attention to its incredible size, Will is suggesting that the snob value is problematic (Pomerantz, 1986). It is so massive that it is a source of trouble. By making this claim, Will is also giving a subtle indication of the logic of academic snobbery. He is suggesting that academic snobs over-emphasise the importance of the difference between the ‘PhD’ and the ‘non-PhD.’ While the difference between these categories of people is implied to be rather small, and its significance therefore relatively minor, the snobs pertain that the difference has a huge, huge value.

There are similarities between this snobbish logic and the ‘narcissism of minor differences’ which Sigmund Freud described (1963, p. 51; see also 1955, p. 101). He observed that ‘it is precisely the minor differences in people who are otherwise alike that form the basis of feelings of strangeness and hostility between them’ (1957, p. 199). When Will talks about the huge, huge snob value, he is suggesting that the snobs go over the top in their valuation of the ‘minor difference’ of the PhD non-PhD thing. They amplify small differences, as Freud

39 William James, in his early essay ‘The Ph.D. Octopus,’ makes a similar argument. He writes that ‘America is thus as a nation rapidly drifting towards a state of things in which no man of science or letters will be accounted respectable unless some kind of badge or diploma is stamped upon him, and in which bare personality will be a mark of outcast estate. It seems to me high time to rouse ourselves to consciousness, and to cast a critical eye upon this decidedly grotesque tendency.’ (James, 1911, p. 334).
said narcissists do. In the remainder of this section, we will investigate the nature of this ‘snobbery of minor differences.’

Will says that he is ‘acutely aware’ of the snob value, and uses the word ‘acutely’ to intensify his degree of awareness (lines 43 to 44). By saying that he is ‘acutely aware’ Will gives the impression that he has had personal experience of the snob value. The extremity of this awareness is suggestive of its problematic nature. Will implies that he is suffering from his awareness, in a similar way to how someone who has an acute physical illness suffers. Will goes on to explain his acute awareness, describing the pressure which exists within his department. He says ‘I mean there is some pressure (.) it’s fairly subtle here to be fair but there is some pressure that ‘for God’s sake (.) when are you going to get this kind’ve PHHD that we thought you were gonna have (yeah) pretty muHHch as soon as you kind of arrived in ni- January nineteen ninety eight’ (lines 44 to 49). Will introduces his critical comments by saying that there is ‘some pressure’ but then quickly concedes that it is ‘fairly subtle’ in his department, ‘to be fair.’ He then reinstates his initial position, saying ‘but there is some pressure.’ By saying ‘to be fair’ Will gives the impression that he is being fair to his department. It seems as though he is praising his department for only having some fairly subtle pressure, which is unlike other departments in other universities, where the pressure might be rather less subtle. However, a pressure which is ‘fairly subtle’ can still be insidious, hard to detect, and therefore difficult to bring out into the open, and combat. Will does not say that there is a ‘small’ amount of pressure in his department, for example. Ironically, by making the concession that the pressure is ‘fairly subtle,’ Will is claiming that there is pressure in his department, and also characterising the precise nature of that pressure (cf. Burke, 1969). At this moment, then, Will is subtly showing an ambivalence towards his department. He is both praising and criticising his department.

Ironically, when Will proceeds to give an example of the pressure in his department, it comes across as anything but ‘fairly subtle.’ The reported speech expression ‘for God’s sake’ does not come across as a subtle remark. If someone actually said this to Will in person, it would sound like an extreme and demanding

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40 It can be noted that Will’s detection of the ‘fairly subtle’ pressure attests to his previously avowed acute awareness of the snob value.
expression of exasperation. However, Will is not suggesting that anyone has actually said this to him directly. He is suggesting that this is a hypothetical utterance, and merely emblematic of the pressure which exists within his department.

While the sentiment ‘for God’s sake’ does not fit Will’s prior characterisation of the fairly subtle ‘pressure,’ it does fit in with his description of the ‘snob value.’ The ‘for God’s sake’ utterance echoes the extremity of the huge, huge snob value. Will is suggesting that these speakers are making a ‘mountain out of a molehill’ in their demands about when he is going to get his PhD. They are snobs, blowing something up out of all proportion, without having reasonable justification for doing so.

Will goes on to evaluate these speakers’ demanding expectations, saying ‘which is (. )fair enough (yeah) d-d-d’you know what I mean t-to a certain extent’ (lines 49 to 50). Although he initially presented the prior sequence of direct reported speech as merely emblematic of the pressure in his department, by evaluating what these people are saying to him, Will suggests that he is taking their words seriously. Their comments are implied to be real enough to warrant this assessment. Initially, Will suggests that they have a fair point. He says that what they are saying is ‘fair enough.’ Whilst their comments might be somewhat bothersome, they are not implied to be entirely unacceptable. For example, the prior reference to the month and year of Will’s arrival (‘January nineteen ninety eight,’ lines 48 to 49; this is some three and a half years prior to the interview) is difficult to argue with, because the facts of the matter cannot so easily be denied (cf. Potter, 1996). However, when Will goes on to say that what they are saying is ‘fair enough … t-to a certain extent’ he is rhetorically conceding that, to a large extent, what they are saying is not fair enough (see Burke, 1969, p. 52). He suggests that he is mostly rejecting what they are saying to him.

Will displays an ambivalence towards the snobs, and gives the impression that he is experiencing ‘the ideological dilemma of the liberal expert, who simultaneously accepts and rejects authority’ (Billig et al., 1988, p. 80). The word ‘authority’ is appropriate in this context, because even though Will presents the direct reported speech as merely emblematic of the pressure, he nevertheless implies that certain people are speaking these words. While he does not identify the speakers explicitly, he strongly suggests who they might be. The first clue is
that they are positioned with the plural pronoun ‘we.’ The use of the ‘we’ suggests that this is a group of people, rather than an individual person. Secondly, the group is reported as asking Will ‘when are you going to get this kind’ve PHHD that we thought you were gonna have … pretty muHHch as soon as you kind of arrived’ (lines 46 to 48). This expectation is characteristic of employers. They would know about Will’s situation upon arrival, and would also be concerned about the progress (or lack of progress) that he is making on his PhD.

It appears as though the institutional ‘powers that be’ in Will’s department – his bosses – are responsible for the demanding words that are spoken. Tragically, Will is suggesting that the ‘snob value’ has an institutional backing. The snob value is certainly ‘huuuuge huuuuge’ because it has a powerful institutional support. Indeed, the snobbery is massive, because it exists within the hierarchy of Will’s university department, and possibly throughout the university system as a whole (something like this is implied between lines 50 and 56). When he makes his conclusion, Will says that he supposes he feels ‘wary’ of styling himself as an academic, until he has got his thesis, when he will be on the other side of the ‘huge schism’ (lines 57 to 58). This wariness might be associated with the powerful, judgemental gaze of the snobs. The PhD non-PhD snobs might criticise or look down upon any premature and/or presumptuous academic styling on the part of Will. The snobs are in power in this department, and Will is suffering from his employers’ snobbish ways, because of his status as a non-PhD.

**Concluding remarks**

In *The Book of Snobs*, Thackeray (1978) casually remarked that ‘I should like to fill several volumes with accounts of various University Snobs; so fond are my reminiscences of them, and so numerous are they’ (p. 60). Although Thackeray was writing about University Snobs some one hundred years ago, we can appreciate how his comments are still pertinent today. University Snobs remain numerous. However, while Thackeray’s reminiscences of University Snobs might have been fond, we have learnt from Will’s account that experiencing University Snobbery can be a decidedly unpleasant experience. A ‘hidden hand of power’ can be detected in Will’s identity project. While his employers are not named as such, they are still implicitly identified as exerting ‘pressure’ upon him to complete his
thesis. Will’s identity work as an academic, or as a non-academic, is therefore implied to be part of a broader University College departmental framework, in which there are social hierarchies, differences in power, and ideological values. In the next chapter, we will explore in more detail the subtle, and not so subtle, dynamics of power and ideology in contemporary doctoral postgraduate life.

I discovered during the course of Will’s interview that, as part of his doctoral thesis, he was using a theoretical concept originally developed by Karl Marx. This concept carried with it critical overtones, and embodied a critique of the organisation of society. As he wrote his thesis, Will used this concept, and made criticisms about the organisation of contemporary society. In the background of these criticisms, however, were actual social divisions and hierarchies, which functioned both to enable and constrain Will’s own intellectual life. In a paradoxical sense, Will was making his criticisms of society within that same society, and working within particular social conditions, which he was also critical of. I think that Marx expressed the dilemma succinctly when he proposed that:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language (Marx, 1852/1950, p. 225).
In this final discourse analytic chapter of the thesis, the analysis turns to some of the power dynamics involved in the process of doing a PhD in the social sciences. It was pointed out in chapter 2 that studies of the doctoral research process often ignore or skate over the role that power and ideology can play in the doing of a doctorate. When researchers do acknowledge the role of power, they often fail to look in detail at its actual workings. In this sense, the academic study of doctoral research often seems to work in the interests of power. The neglect makes it more difficult to identify and challenge the structures of power inherent in the PhD process. The present chapter aims to contribute to empirical discourse studies of the power relations between teachers and their students (e.g. Benwell and Stokoe, 2002; Edwards and Mercer, 1987; Hepburn, 2000). By bringing attention to and analysing some of the power relations between doctoral students and their supervisors, the thesis both resists and reproduces the power dynamics involved in doing a doctorate.

The general argument of this chapter is that when liberal power is working successfully, it is mostly hidden, and therefore difficult to detect and bring out into the open. The first section concerns the liberal ideology of doctoral supervision, and shows how this ideology can work to hide the operation of power. It is suggested that a detailed discursive analysis of student-supervisor relations has the potential to bring out into the open the machinations of hidden liberal power. The second section concerns different forms of power which can influence a student as they do their doctorate. While the doctoral student in question denies that his supervisor has ‘pushed’ him towards publishing in a particular journal, he nevertheless acknowledges that there are wider forces which can ‘push’ one towards publishing. In this sense, it is suggested that there is more to doctoral power than the interpersonal aspect between students and their supervisors. The third section concerns claims about the obvious or blatant exertion of supervisory power, and appears to result in the doctoral student in question becoming disillusioned with academic life. We will find that when the supervisory relationship breaks down, the workings of power often become clearer, and the role of ideology can be appreciated more explicitly. It therefore follows that, as
power becomes more obvious and blatant, the need for detailed discursive analysis lessens.

It is important to point out that the argument of this chapter is not that supervisors 'have power' over their doctoral students in any straightforward sense. Although supervisors may attempt to control their students, this 'top down' exertion of power is not the main focus of interest. Instead, power is understood as something which works between people, from the 'bottom up' so to speak. Thus, power is understood broadly in the sense given to it by Michel Foucault (1991; see also Hepburn, 2003). The supervisory relationship is understood as a largely consensual power relationship, which doctoral students both participate in, and resist. Furthermore, this relationship is backgrounded by much wider ideological patterns, as we shall begin to appreciate as the analysis progresses.

(i) Hidden Power

In the previous chapter, Will spoke of the 'fairly subtle' pressures in his department for him to get his PhD finished, and implicitly suggested that a hidden hand of power affected him in his life as a doctoral student and young lecturer. While the figures who held this power were not explicitly named, they nevertheless seemed to play an important role in his identity work. The present section picks up on some of the 'hidden' or 'subtle' power dynamics in doctoral work by focusing upon the relationship between a doctoral student and her supervisor. The extract to be analysed is taken from an interview with 'Hanako.' Hanako is a Japanese mature student of psychology in the final year of her doctoral study. In the sequence presented, Hanako tells a story about attempting to publish a book chapter with her supervisor, 'Pete.' The extract begins with Steven asking Hanako a question about publishing. Through the analysis of the story that Hanako tells, wider stories can be told about doctoral research, along with the role of power and ideology within contemporary higher education.

41 'Power, whether it be 'in' or 'behind' discourse, is never definitively held by any one person, or social grouping, because power can be won and exercised only in and through social struggles in which it may also be lost' (Fairclough, 2001, p. 36).
Steven have you published anything from the thesis?

(0.7)

Hanako mmmmmmm no- not yet

right

Hanako I’ve written some (. ) draft chapter (. ) (mm) of erm (0.6) a book
chapter that my supervisor and I decided to do (mm) but (. ) ahh
(. ) draft came back with comments (. ) and we need to woHHRk
on (. ) a lot of things (a- riHHght) so (. ) I decided to focus on my
thesis first (. ) (yes) and then (. ) after (1.0) the (0.7) thesis then
(0.6) I can (0.7) take the chapter (. ) and then in- (1.5) (mm) ahm
made into a (0.6) journal aHHrticle hopefully

Steven right (0.9) how did that draft (. ) chapter come about?

(0.6)

Hanako *the draft chapter* (0.7) of the book (.)

(mmm) (0.8) aahhm (2.5) *I did it* (1.0) with the momentum
of the conference (. ) I did in Australia this this past summer (.)
(right) and er as a way of finishing the conference (. ) (mm) paper
(mm) (0.9) and also I was planning to do that- (. ) ahh (. ) do a
chapter (. ) based on the conference paper so (m) it wa- a- e-
(0.6) *for me it’s always* (1.0) related (. ) like I use something (.)
that I did (. ) as a small project (yes) and then (. )
making it bigger and deeper (. ) in terms of (ye-) analysis (yes)
is always (. ) practical way of getting myself motivated (. ) (yeah)
and seeing the realistic (. ) goal (. ) (yeah) so (0.6) from that (0.6)
conference paper chapter ((smiley voice)) (mm) and then (. )
Pete suggested that it- we should do a book chapter on
somebody’s ahm edit- edited (. ) book (yes) so I just use (. ) the
Australia paperHH (uhuhm yHHeah) and get some more (0.6)
ahm (mm) (0.9) ahm (0.8) adjustment (mm) to the orientation
to the book (right) (.) and Pete put some touch ups (. ) ahm to
make it (. ) work (mm) and he said ‘okayt- you don’t have to
do much just do this and this and this’ and then I did what he
suggested to do ((smiley voice)) (yes) and he just submitted it
and then we received commen- a lot of comments (. ) ahh saying
(1.0) basically I feel hhuh they didn’t understand this (. )
( . ) cognitive (. ) perspective (right) ( . ) the kind of analytical take
( . ) (yes) that (0.6) we had
(0.6)

Steven so you submitted it twice then ( . ) is that right?

Hanako ahm (1.4) I- we submitted it once and then we received the
comments (oh) yah (I see)

In discursive psychology, if a story is told within the context of an interview, then it is important to acknowledge this social context by transcribing and analysing what the interviewer says, along with what the interviewee says (see, for example, Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995). To understand what Hanako is doing when she tells the first story about the draft chapter (line 5 onwards), we need to look back to see what happened in the preceding lines. By asking the question ‘have you published anything from the thesis?’ (line 1), Steven establishes a subtle frame of accountability. He implies that Hanako might have, or should have, published something from her thesis. When Hanako answers with ‘mmmmmmm no- not yet’ (line 3), she shows her awareness of this accountability. While she might not have published anything from her thesis ‘yet,’ she implies that she expects to publish from it in the future. It is only after giving this reply that Hanako then proceeds to tell the first story of the draft book chapter (lines 5 to 11). As Richard Buttny (1993) points out, speakers often use narratives to ‘re-present past events in such a way to defend their conduct’ (p. 18). By telling her story, Hanako defends or justifies her ‘no- not yet’ reply to the question. She implies that she has good reasons for not yet having published, and that these reasons will be evident, based upon the story she tells.
Dilemmas of doctoral publishing

The literature on doctoral study gives some indication that publishing at doctoral level is by no means straightforward. Doctoral postgraduates are expected to publish to show that they are being productive researchers and that they can secure academic jobs. However, the concern expressed in the United Kingdom about the falling submission rates of social science doctorates has meant that doctoral postgraduates are expected to complete and submit their theses as quickly as possible. The tension between completing the thesis and working on publications is not in itself ideological, but it becomes ideological within the context of the supervisory relationship, for it directly relates to issues of power, and to the demands of the wider institutional and economic context. As we found in the review of the sociological literature in chapter 2, the role of the doctoral postgraduate is ambivalent, being composed of the contradictory demands of autonomy and dependency (e.g. Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 2000). Hanako strikes a balance between her autonomy and dependency with regards her supervisor by placing a rhetorical limit on her publishing activities. For example, she describes her attempt at publishing in such a way as to imply that it did not involve that much work. When asked how the draft chapter came about, she says that she did it as a way of finishing the conference paper (lines 15 to 17). By saying this, Hanako implies that the conference paper was nearly finished already, and therefore that most of the work on the draft chapter had been done previously. Similarly, when she says that the draft was the Australia paper, with adjustments to fit the orientation of the book (lines 28 to 30), she is implying that the publication involved minimal work.

When Hanako says that she was planning to do a thesis chapter, based on the conference paper (lines 18 to 19), she is again justifying doing the publication. This description of a plan is what discursive psychologists have called a ‘stake inoculation’ because Hanako is protecting herself against the possible accusation that the book chapter was topically unrelated to her thesis, and therefore a diversion from her doctoral work (Edwards and Potter, 1992). While Hanako implies that this attempted publication did not involve that much work, she also implies that it might have involved a lot of work, had it been pursued any further. For example, she says that the draft book chapter came back from the editors with
comments, and that her supervisor and herself need to work on ‘a lot of things’ (line 8). The description ‘a lot of things’ is rhetorical in the sense that it is used to justify why the publication was abandoned. After all, to work on ‘a lot of things’ might involve a lot of work: possibly too much work for a thesis publication during the period of doctoral study.

Hanako identifies her thesis as the reason for the publication being abandoned. She says that she decided to focus on her thesis first, and that after the thesis she hopes to take the chapter and make it into a journal article (lines 8 to 11). By saying that she decided to focus on her thesis first (lines 8 to 9), Hanako gives priority to her thesis, and thereby presents herself as a dependent thesis student. However, there is also the subtle implication that publishing in the future is expected. This is implied by her addition of the word ‘first.’ While she presents herself as dependent by claiming to focus on her thesis, Hanako does not dismiss future publishing and the corresponding identity of the independent research academic completely.

Dilemmas of credit and positioning

The doctoral student’s pushing and pulling alternation between autonomy and dependency with regard to the supervisor can be appreciated more explicitly when Hanako describes the work that went into the draft book chapter. This is because she negotiates a balance between crediting herself and crediting her supervisor for the work done on the chapter. Van Langenhove and Harré (1999) point out that conversations ‘have story lines and the positions people take in a conversation will be linked to these story lines’ (p. 17) and go on to claim that ‘whenever there are story lines, there are positionings’ (p. 30). But what is positioning? ‘Positioning … is the discursive process whereby people are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines’ (Davies and Harré, 1999, p. 37).

In the present extract, there are variations in the positionings that are made in the story of the book chapter. At the beginning of the extract, Hanako says that she and her supervisor decided to do the book chapter (lines 5 to 6). However, when she is asked how the book chapter came about (line 12), she says that she did it with the momentum of the conference she did in Australia during the previous
summer (lines 15 to 16). It could be suggested that variation in this story is to be expected, because any coauthorship is going to involve an element of negotiation (Fox and Faver, 1982). However, collaborative publications of doctoral postgraduates and their supervisors are ideological because the negotiation itself is not egalitarian (see Heffner, 1979). The variation in this particular story is therefore argued to reflect the contrary themes of ideology (Billig et al., 1988).

The ideological tension between autonomy and dependency in the supervisory relationship unfolds in a subtle manner as soon as the sequence begins. Derek Edwards (1997) argues that where to start a story is ‘a major and rhetorically potent, way of managing causality and accountability’ (p. 277). By starting the story by saying ‘I’ve written some (. ) draft chapter ... of a book chapter’ (lines 5 to 6), Hanako prioritises her own agency and takes sole credit for the writing of the chapter. Hanako’s appearance as a singularity is ‘achieved grammatically through the use of the first person singular’ (van Langenhove and Harré, 1999, p. 24). At this moment, Hanako is presenting herself as an independent researcher or scholar. However, by going on to say that it was a book chapter that ‘my supervisor and I decided to do’ (line 6), she gives the impression that the decision to do the book chapter was made jointly. The contradiction is that while the decision to write the book chapter might have been made mutually, Hanako is also claiming to have written the draft chapter all by herself.

Hanako goes on to say that the book chapter came back with comments and that ‘we’ need to work on a lot of things (lines 6 to 8). In Hanako’s use of the plural pronoun, ‘other persons are brought into an obligation pattern and the responsibility of the speaker is accordingly reduced’ (Mühlhäusler and Harré, 1990, p. 178). While she initially takes credit for the writing of the draft chapter, Hanako goes on to bring her supervisor into an obligation pattern for the subsequent work that needs to be done on the draft. However, Hanako goes on to say that she decided to focus on her thesis first, and that after the thesis she hopes to take the chapter and make it into a journal article (lines 8 to 11). She thereby imagines herself making the chapter into a journal article independently of her supervisor.

When Steven asks the question ‘how did that draft (. ) chapter come about?’ (line 12), he uses a formulation that does not ascribe agency to the action of how the draft chapter came about. The agency for the production of the draft chapter is
obscured through this agentless formulation. This formulation allows him to ‘avoid endorsing a particular story about responsibility’ (Potter, 1996, p. 182). Steven therefore leaves the question of agency for the production of the draft chapter to Hanako (on the ideological implications of agentless formulations, see Fowler et al., 1979). When Hanako says ‘I (. ) I did it (1.0) with the momentum of the conference (. ) I did in Australia this this past summer’ (lines 15 to 16; emphasis her own), she brings attention to, and emphasises, that she was the one who did the draft chapter. She presents the chapter as something she did by herself. In fact, she does not even mention her supervisor until much later (line 26). This sequential ordering of the story has a rhetorical effect in the sense that Hanako is prioritising her own part in the draft and minimizing the part played by her supervisor. A ‘we did it’ form of accounting, which might have been expected based on what Hanako said earlier about the joint decision to do the book chapter (line 6), is absent from this telling.

By giving the impression that she has done most of the work on the chapter, Hanako presents herself as independent of her supervisor, and as someone who is working autonomously. However, this semblance of autonomy is contradicted when Hanako introduces ‘Pete’ into the story line (line 26). Earlier on in the extract, when she used the institutional identity category ‘supervisor’ (line 6), Hanako gave the impression that this relationship was not a relationship of equals. By positioning her supervisor, Hanako implicitly positioned herself as a student, as someone who is supervised. After all, ‘when somebody positions somebody else, that always implies a position of the person him/herself’ (van Langenhove and Harré, 1999, p. 22). When she comes to tell the story again, however, Hanako uses the shortened first name of her supervisor (‘Pete’ rather than ‘Peter’) to position him in the story line (line 26). By saying ‘Pete’ Hanako implies that she is on equal terms with her supervisor. Hanako gives the impression that she and her supervisor are friends or colleagues, rather than student and supervisor.

The utterance ‘Pete suggested that it- we should do a book chapter on somebody’s ahm edit- edited (. ) book’ (lines 26 to 27) comes across as a proposal for an egalitarian collaboration between equals. This is because Pete is reported as using the pronoun ‘we’ which implies that the authorship of the book chapter will be a mutual, collaborative affair. However, within this context of the supervisory relationship, a ‘suggestion’ like the one attributed to Pete is rarely a mere
suggestion. Rather, such a suggestion can work as a piece of advice, a recommendation, or even a command (Li, 2000). Pete’s suggestion that ‘we’ should do a book chapter should therefore not be taken at face value. The ambivalent or dilemmatic character of the proposed coauthorship becomes apparent when Hanako goes on to say ‘so I just use (.) the Australia paperHH’ (lines 27 to 28) and when she uses the first person pronoun ‘I’ to position herself as personally using the Australia paper. Hanako does not suggest that ‘we’ used the Australia paper, as might have been expected, based on what Pete is claimed to have said to her previously. As Hanako said that she did the conference herself (line 16), the Australia paper is implied to consist of her own work. Also, by using the word ‘just,’ Hanako implies that her use of the Australia paper was simple or straightforward. She mitigates the possibility that the book chapter involved a lot of difficult and time-consuming work.

Hanako proceeds to say that ‘Pete put some touch ups (.) ahm to make it (. ) work’ (lines 30 to 31). What Pete is described as doing is implied to be minimal, both in terms of the amount of work he did (‘some’), and the type of his contribution (‘touch ups’). Hanako gives the impression that what Pete did was superfluous, for ‘touch ups’ might connote superficial changes to the document, such as changes in spelling and grammar, for example. Also, the amount of touch ups (‘some’) implies a couple or a few (i.e., not that many). In this sense, the claim that ‘Pete put some touch ups’ is a risky one. Hanako might be understood as undermining her supervisor’s work, or as criticising him for not doing enough work. However, by carefully adding ‘ahm to make it (. ) work’ Hanako implicitly praises Pete. She gives him the ability to make the paper work merely by making ‘some touch ups.’ Hanako implies that the paper did not work as it was, and that it might not have worked, had it not been for Pete’s supervisory ‘touch ups.’ Pete is thereby given expertise and authority as a supervisor, and Hanako implicitly presents herself as being dependent on his textual ‘touch ups.’

In summary, Hanako strikes a balance between presenting Pete’s work as minimal and superficial on the one hand, and as essential and vital on the other. By bringing attention to his expertise and authority, Hanako is positioning herself as a student, someone who is dependent on her supervisor. However, as the role of the doctoral student is ambivalent, this presentation of dependency cannot be left unchecked. By minimising both the amount and the significance of her
supervisor’s contributions, Hanako lessens the apparent hold that her supervisor has over her, and over her work, and thereby presents herself as somewhat more independent.

Natural divisions of labour

In *Ideology* Terry Eagleton (1991) brings attention to how ideology can ‘naturalise’ forms of social life. ‘Successful ideologies are often thought to render their beliefs natural and self-evident – to identify them with the ‘common sense’ of a society that nobody could imagine how they might ever be different’ (p. 58). The extract under analysis can be understood as a general example of the naturalisation of the ideology of supervision, because at no point is the supervisory relationship ever questioned or criticised. It is never implied that supervision is a partial and/or contingent form of relationship. Along with this general sense of naturalisation, however, there are specific moments in this sequence when the supervisory relationship is being naturalised. One of these moments comes after Hanako credits Pete for making the touch ups on the draft chapter. She says that ‘he said ‘okayt- you don’t have to do much just do this and this and this’’ (lines 31 to 32). At this point, Hanako changes her footing and uses direct reported speech to articulate what Pete is supposed to have said to her (Goffman, 1983, chapter 3). Hanako claims that Pete said ‘you don’t have to do much just do this and this and this.’ The ‘this and this and this’ is what conversation analysts have called a ‘triple single’ (Jefferson, 1990). Triple singles can sometimes be used in conversations to imply ‘muchness.’ The repetition of the same word three times can imply ‘many things.’ However, the earlier ‘you don’t have to do much’ and the use of the word ‘just’ both work to contradict this meaning of the triple single. The word ‘just’ for example places a rhetorical limit on the number of things that are to be done on the draft chapter. Pete’s suggestion that Hanako has to ‘just do this and this and this’ comes across as a suggestion that is specific in its scope. Hanako is not criticising Pete for being a slave driver who orders her to do a great deal of work. She is only being told to do three specific things on the paper.

The implied specificity of this suggestion constructs Pete as someone who can make appropriate suggestions about what needs to be done. By going on to
say that the draft chapter was then submitted (line 33), Hanako implies that the ‘touch ups’ and the suggested ‘this and this and this’ were enough to complete the draft chapter sufficiently for submittal. Thus, Hanako again constitutes her supervisor’s expertise and her own dependence on that expertise. Reliance on expertise, however, often comes at a price (Billig at al., 1988, chapter 5). After all, Hanako did not report Pete’s saying that ‘he’ doesn’t have to do much, or even that ‘we’ don’t have to do much. His actual reported speech – ‘you don’t have to do much’ (emphasis added) – gives the impression that it is obvious that Hanako is to do the work on the draft chapter. The inequality of this coauthorship, and of the supervisory relationship itself, is therefore presented as something self-evident and natural. After reporting Pete’s suggestion, Hanako goes on to say ‘and then I did what he suggested to do’ (lines 32 to 33).

The dilemmatic submittal

Hanako says that Pete ‘just submitted’ the draft to the editors (line 33). Here, she is referring to the physical act of submitting, and attributing this act to Pete. When Hanako makes this attribution, she is again negotiating the themes of autonomy and dependency. By using the word ‘just’ she gives the impression that her supervisor’s submitting act was simple or straightforward. Pete is said to have ‘just’ posted the chapter off to the editors, for example. By suggesting that Pete’s act was minimal or marginal, Hanako presents herself as somewhat autonomous (or potentially autonomous) from her supervisor. However, this suggestion of autonomy is undermined, because the draft chapter would have had no chance of being published, had it not been ‘submitted.’ In a way, the conference paper cannot be a proper paper unless it becomes a book chapter, that is, unless it is published. At an implicit level, then, Pete’s act of submitting comes across as vital or necessary, and Hanako’s dependence on him therefore becomes apparent.

When Steven asks Hanako for clarification about the submittal, the following exchange takes place. It is at this moment that the doctoral dilemma of autonomy and dependency appears to come to a head, albeit in a very subtle way.
Earlier on, Hanako said that Pete submitted the draft chapter to the editors, and thereby identified him as the sole submitting agent. However, when Steven asks for clarification about the submittal, he does not take into account this earlier claim. For example, he does not ask Hanako whether ‘Pete’ submitted it twice. Instead, Steven uses the pronoun ‘you’ (line 39), which in this context refers to a somewhat ambiguous submitting agent. The agent denoted by ‘you’ could be either Hanako, or Hanako and her supervisor. Hanako shows her awareness of this ambiguity when she says ‘I- we’ (line 41), and uses the first person singular, but then abruptly cuts herself off and repairs with the first person plural. The version that is left unrepaired is ‘we submitted it.’

When Hanako said that Pete ‘just’ submitted the draft chapter, she was referring to the physical activity of submitting (line 33). There, Pete was credited for sending the draft off to the editors. In the later clarification sequence (lines 39 to 42), however, it is not necessarily the case that the physical act of submitting is being invoked. This is because to ‘submit’ a paper can also mean to ‘author’ a paper in the sense that several authors can ‘submit a paper’ without them all posting it off to the editors together. This double, or ambiguous, meaning of ‘submit’ is being played on in this final part of the extract, and it is what allows Hanako to say ‘we submitted it’ and leave it unrepaired.

But what of the ‘I’ who submitted it? The ambiguity of the meaning of ‘submit’ means that Hanako, had she said ‘I submitted it,’ might have given the impression that she was the sole author of this draft chapter. By repairing with the plural ‘we,’ she takes partial credit, rather than sole personal credit, for the authorship. The use of the pronoun ‘we’ seems to be a more persuasive taking of credit and responsibility than the use of ‘I’ (for more on the ideological aspects of pronoun use, see Billig, 1995; Maitland and Wilson, 1987).
Concluding summary

The suggestion that Pete is said to have made to Hanako, that ‘we’ should do a book chapter, came across as a proposal for an egalitarian collaboration between colleagues of equal status. However, this implied equality was contradicted by the details of the book chapter narration, in which a taken-for-granted inequality was articulated. The publication eventually came across not so much as a collaboration between colleagues, but as a decidedly unequal affair.42

One of the functions of ideology is to soften or conceal the operation of power. Thus, Hanako does not directly talk of power – her supervisor appears as a friend, a colleague, or an advisor – but not directly as a figure with power. The analysis implicitly points to the possible operation and hiding of power within the liberal relations between a doctoral student and her supervisor (for more on ideology critique, see Simons and Billig, 1994; Fairclough, 2001). The dilemmas identified stretch further than this individual student and her supervisor, however, for they are reflections of broader themes relating to the roles of doctoral students and their supervisors, the conflicting themes of autonomy and collaboration, and the institutional powers of British universities, which are funded directly by government.

(ii) Different Forms of Power

In the following analysis, we will continue to look at how the themes of autonomy and dependency are played out in doctoral student life, but go further than the power dynamics which can be said to exist between doctoral students and their supervisors. We will consider a case in which the notion of ‘pushing’ is introduced in a description of doctoral student publishing. While the doctoral student in question denies that his supervisor has ‘pushed’ him into publishing his thesis work in a particular journal, he nevertheless suggests that he has been

42 For more on the somewhat illusory nature of ‘equality’ within the context of liberal educational practice, see Edwards and Mercer (1987); Tracy and Carjuzáa (1993); Tracy and Muller (1994); Tracy (1997).
pushed towards publishing in general, but by wider forces which are not explicitly named.

The extract to be analysed is taken from a pilot interview which I did when I was less than one month into the first year of my own PhD (October, 2000). The interview was with David, who was a third year doctoral student of social psychology, and about to submit his thesis. We are sitting in Linford’s Restaurant at Loughborough University during lunch time, hence the eating (see lines 4 and 31). I think that this interview extract is interesting for several different reasons. not least because we were eating lunch. The first reason is that David and I shared the same supervisor, Michael Billig, and therefore knew each other prior to the interview. Our acquaintedness results in some rather peculiar interview moments. For example, David does not refer to his ‘supervisor’ (line 21) by name until I say ‘Mick’ (line 28), after which he himself uses the same shortened first name form (line 31). The second interesting feature is that I ask a challenging question quite unlike any of the questions we have been looking at previously (see lines 26 to 28). Whether the asking of this question was a result of my relative inexperience as an interviewer, or because I was previously acquainted with David, I cannot be sure. Nevertheless, it is interesting to look at what happens when this question is asked, as well as the various different issues which it raises.

Extract 2

1 Steven do you have like a- (1.8) what- what’s your view on publishing at the moment with respect to that work that you’re doin’ now? (2.0)
2
3 David erm (1.9) well- ((eating)) (1.2) hopefully (1.0) I’m not really thinking about publishing at all (. ) at the moment (mmm) but as soon as I’ve submitted t- by the end of this year (. ) (mmm) (. ) then (. ) I hopefully will be- (. ) publishing (1.4) various bits of it pulli- pulling various bits of it together and publishing something in (. ) Discourse and Society will be the first choice (. )
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11 Steven right right

183
but that's the immediate thing (.) aahhm (1.4) yeh

where has that choice t- (.) go for Discourse and Society? (.)

come from

(1.3)

it seems- because my PhD is basically (.) ahhm (.) taking a
discursive approach (.) to (.) looking at (.) ideol- ideology and
(mmmm mm) aahhm (0.6) current politics (.) it seems the
obvious choice cos it's (.) a critical journal (.) (mmm) er it's
interested in s-s-s- systematic discourse analysis (.)
(yeah yeah) aaaaaannd (.) aaaaahm my supervisor happens
to be a co-editor? (mmm ((laughing voice))) ahh (mm)
you know all those things which push you (.) (yeeaaah)
towards it

(0.6)

y'use this idea of pushing towards it (.) is-is- (0.6)
is that something that you (1.1) welcome that (0.6) that
opportunity (1.1) say o- offered through Mick?
((hearably challenging))
(0.7)

erm (1.4) ((eating quickly)) wel- no- (0.7) Mick hasn't pushed
me towards it that's wrong I mean- (.) (mmm) what I'm saying
is that (.) the basic context is (.) that it's a sort'we very familiar
(.) you know it's close it's (.) (yeah) it's what we're sort've-
you know we read regularly (.) (absolutely) it's not like
pushing towards it it's an obvious choice in that sense (yeah)
aahhm (1.1) thee (.) what's being pushed towards is just the
idea that I have to publish (.) aannd (mm mm) after all that
work I should really publish something from the PhD (yeah)
okay? (yeah) that's what (.) I mean (.) (mm) aahhm (.) the
journal itself I don't- (0.6) that- that just seems an obvious
choice the most (.) (yeah) appropriate stuff because there's
very similar analysis to what I'm doing (absolutely) like people
like Salskov-Iversen and Condor recently have do- (.) which is
such a similar approach that- (mmm) you know it’s the place
to do it really (yeah) ahhm (yeah) (1.1) but (1.7) yeah erm

At the beginning of this extract, we can detect the same tension found in the
Hanako extract, between publishing during the thesis, or waiting until after the
thesis is completed to publish. Steven asks David what his view on publishing is
‘at the moment’ with respect to the work he is doing ‘now’ (lines 1 to 2). When he
replies, David says that he is not thinking about publishing ‘at all at the moment’
but that ‘as soon’ as he has submitted, he hopes to publish something in the
journal Discourse & Society. Thus David does not discount publishing entirely.
but claims to be delaying his publishing until after he has submitted his PhD
thesis. David’s hope to publish something after submitting his thesis is similar to
Hanako’s hope of publishing a journal article after her thesis is finished (extract 1,
lines 8 to 11). In both cases, the thesis publishing must wait until after the doctoral
thesis is completed.

Academic ambition

As was the case with Hanako, David does not say that he intends to publish an
article in collaboration with his supervisor in the future. Instead, he gives the
impression that he will be publishing on his own (see lines 7 to 9). By describing
his hope to publish in this way, David presents himself as someone who is, or is in
the process of becoming, an independent academic or researcher. However, David
subtly mitigates how confident he appears to be with regards his publishing
intentions. For example, he says that, as soon as he has submitted his thesis by the
end of the year, he will ‘hopefully’ be publishing various bits of it (lines 6 to 7;
line 4; see also Hanako in extract 1, line 11). At this moment, David does not
come across as arrogant about his future publishing intentions. Instead, he retains
a degree of modesty and caution, appropriate to his position as a doctoral student.

When he goes on to say that he will be ‘publishing something in (. )
Discourse and Society will be the first choice’ (lines 8 to 9), however, David runs
the risk of sounding too presumptuous or ambitious about his publishing. This is
firstly because he specifically names the location of his hoped for future
publication: the academic journal Discourse & Society (for the editor’s opening
remarks in the first issue of this journal, see Van Dijk, 1990). The naming of this particular journal is significant, because not all journals are equivalently regarded within the academic milieu of which they are a part. Different academic journals can be inferred as having different levels of status or prestige associated with them. Furthermore, in a society saturated with the vales of marketisation, academic journals come to differ in terms of the value or worth they are accorded within the academic marketplace (see, for example, Harvie, 2000). 43 One of the inferences which could be made about David, based upon his expressed hope to publish in Discourse & Society, therefore, concerns his academic ambition. Is he being too ambitious, relative to his status, in intending to publish in this particular journal? Secondly, when David says that Discourse & Society will be ‘the first choice’ (line 9), he might be suggesting either that this journal is his first choice of submittal, or that this will be the first journal he publishes his thesis work in. Irrespective of the particular meaning of the expression ‘first choice,’ the suggestion is that in some sense the journal Discourse & Society is a journal worth aiming for. It is not David’s last choice, his last resort. It will be the first choice. Again, the possible danger is that David might be aiming too high in making this particular journal his ‘first choice,’ especially for a doctoral student publishing his thesis work independently.

David does not immediately offer a justification for why Discourse & Society will be the first choice. As such, he implies that this state of affairs is something straightforward and taken for granted. It is only when Steven picks up on what David said about this journal being the first choice, when he asks the question ‘where has that choice t- (. ) go for Discourse and Society? (. ) come from’ (lines 13 to 14), that David is held accountable for choosing to publish there. Steven does not ask David where the choice to publish in general has come from, but rather where the choice to go for this particular journal has come from.

Steven’s use of the word ‘go’ in this question might be important for how it relates to academic ambition. As was mentioned earlier, it is possible that the journal Discourse & Society is a bit out of David’s reach; he might be aiming too

43 Indeed, the name of an academic journal can act like a promotional badge. By naming a particular journal, one gives that journal publicity, and simultaneously sells the journal as one sells oneself as a particular kind of academic, even as a ‘critical’ academic (Billig. 2000, 2003).
high in ‘going’ for this particular journal. David responds to Steven’s question by justifying his decision to go for his chosen publication, and as he does so, he mitigates against the idea that he is over reaching himself. David’s justifications seem rhetorically designed to work against the idea that he is aiming too high in choosing to publish in *Discourse & Society*. He says that his PhD is taking a discursive approach to looking at ideology and current politics, and that ‘it seems the obvious choice’ (lines 16 to 19; the word ‘it’ is used here to denote the journal in question.) By saying that this journal ‘seems’ the obvious choice (line 18), David is implying that he is making a measured judgement, based upon the facts of the situation. David is suggesting that there is a topical correspondence between his PhD thesis and the journal. There is a kind of fit between his work and the work of the journal (see also lines 40 to 46), which unproblematically leads to his choice to publish there.

Although David identifies the journal *Discourse & Society* as being ‘the obvious choice,’ he nevertheless goes on to give justifications for this choice. He explains or defends his choice to go for this particular journal by offering three justifications, including the ‘critical’ status of the journal, its interest in ‘systematic discourse analysis’ and finally that his supervisor happens to be a ‘co-editor’ (lines 19 to 22). It can be noted that David justifies his choice to publish in *Discourse & Society* through recourse to topic, rather than quality. He specifically does not say that he thinks his work is good enough to be published in this particular journal.

The third and final part of the list, that David’s supervisor happens to be a co-editor, is conspicuous for two reasons. Firstly, David and Steven shared the same supervisor, so it is interesting that David refers to his ‘supervisor’ in the way that he does. Secondly, when David says that his supervisor ‘happens’ to be a co-editor, he is suggesting that it is a mere coincidence that his supervisor is a co-editor of a journal he is hoping to publish his thesis work in. What is implied is that this state of affairs might be a bit too much of a coincidence, and it is this kind of possibility which Steven picks up on in his subsequent question (lines 26 to 29), which we will analyse in the following section.

It is important to point out at this stage that David’s claim about his supervisor being a co-editor has a humorous quality to it. When Steven says ‘mmm’ in response to what David is saying (line 22), he does so in a laughing
voice, thereby signalling the humorous nature of what is being said. Indeed, David’s reference to his ‘supervisor’ adds to this humour. Any serious interpretations of David’s situation, such as him having a better chance of getting published in Discourse & Society because of his supervisor, or using his academic connections to further his career, are subtly guarded against through this use of humour (for more on the serious import of humour, see Emerson, 1969; Emerson, 1973).

Proximal and distal powers

After offering his justifications for why he has chosen to publish in Discourse & Society, David finishes his turn by saying ‘you know all those things which push you (. ) (yeeaaah) towards it’ (lines 23 to 24). This final sentiment has a normative character to it; by saying ‘you know all those things which push you ... towards it’ (emphasis added), David suggests that this is a general phenomenon which is somewhat ordinary and taken for granted. Steven gives an emphatic ‘yeeaaah’ agreement in response to David’s comment (line 23).

What David is saying here comes across as contrary to ambition. There are things which ‘push’ one towards it, rather than one desiring to do it oneself. Within this context, ‘it’ could refer to David publishing his work in general, or publishing in Discourse & Society in particular. Although David does not say that he himself is being pushed, he does indirectly suggest that something like this might be happening. (This kind of possibility is expressed soon after, when Steven asks his question and David responds.) And although David does not say that there is anyone in particular who is doing the pushing, he does suggest that there are situational or contextual factors which may push people towards publishing; there are ‘things’ which push you (see also lines 37 to 39). It is noteworthy that, at this moment (lines 23 to 24), David does not indicate that he is being humorous, and nor does Steven show any signs of humour. This seriousness continues when Steven comes in and asks his ‘challenging’ question.
Steven’s question is delicately formulated; he pauses several times, and does several false starts. He thereby gives the impression that he is negotiating a somewhat difficult and sensitive topic. Firstly, Steven brings attention to David’s use of the ‘idea of pushing towards it’ (emphasis his own) and thereby holds David accountable for using this idea. Steven suggests that there is something about the use of this idea which needs to be justified or explained. After saying this in a relatively straightforward manner, Steven then starts to show some difficulty in formulating what he is asking David. Steven asks ‘is-is- (0.6) is that something that you (1.1) welcome that (0.6) that opportunity (1.1) say o- offered through Mick?’ (lines 26 to 28; emphasis his own). By asking this question, Steven is taking David’s mildly humorous comment about his supervisor happening to be a co-editor as serious. Steven assumes something like the idea that Mick, as a consequence of his position as a co-editor of Discourse & Society, has offered David the opportunity to publish his thesis work in that journal, and that David has accepted this offer. Steven asks David whether he ‘welcomes’ that ‘opportunity,’ ‘say o- offered through Mick?’

This is a somewhat unfavourable version of events, because it strongly suggests that David will not necessarily be publishing in this journal because of the standard of his work, but because of his relationship with his supervisor. Steven is suggesting that David would be using his academic connections to get published, rather than drawing upon his own ability as a scholar. By referring to David’s supervisor as ‘Mick’ Steven displays a level of familiarity towards his supervisor, and thereby personalises the issue.

David is quick to take issue with what he thinks Steven has assumed in his question. He swallows his food quickly and says ‘wel- no- (0.7) Mick hasn’t pushed me towards it that’s wrong’ (lines 31 to 32). David disagrees with the assumption which he suggests Steven has made in his question: that Mick has
pushed him towards publishing in *Discourse & Society*. He clearly states that this is the wrong interpretation, saying ‘that’s wrong.’ David denies that Mick has behaved in an authoritative manner, ‘pushing’ him towards publishing in that journal, contrary to normative liberal practice.

What kinds of power are being invoked at this moment in the exchange? In his work on distress and psychotherapy, David Smail (2001) outlines the difference between what he describes as ‘proximal powers’ and ‘distal powers.’

In fact, of course, our lives are most powerfully controlled by forces that are completely out of site. It is in many ways a truism that those things which you ‘can do nothing about’ are the ones which tend to affect your life the most profoundly. Our world is structured, then, by powers at varying degrees of distance from us. Those closest to us – proximal powers – are the most salient, the ones which preoccupy us most, the ones focused on by psychology, the most amenable to our personal intervention, and the weakest. Those furthest from us – distal powers – are the least salient, the ones we tend to spend least time thinking about, the ones focused on by sociology and politics, almost entirely impervious to merely personal influence, and the strongest (Smail, 2001, p. 37).

The pushing and pulling which might go on between doctoral students and their supervisors can be understood as the exertion of ‘proximal powers.’ That is, they are the local, immediate and most visible dynamics of power, taking place within the interpersonal context of the supervisory relationship. It is something like ‘proximal power’ which was invoked in the Hanako analysis, and it is also invoked by David when he says that Mick hasn’t ‘pushed’ him towards ‘it.’ In both cases, the power in question is the kind that exists interpersonally, between supervisor and student.

David goes on to explain the choice to publish in *Discourse & Society*, and indirectly argues against the idea that Mick has pushed him towards publishing in this journal. David suggests that Steven has misinterpreted what he has been saying. He clarifies himself, saying ‘what I’m saying is that (. .) the basic context is (. .) that it’s a sort’ve very familiar (. .) you know it’s close it’s (. .) (yeah) it’s what we’re sort’ve- you know we read regularly’ (lines 32 to 35; emphasis his own). Here the familiarity, closeness and regular reading of the journal are offered as justifications. The final part of the list – the mutual, regular reading of the journal – is rhetorically contrastive to the idea that Mick has told David to read this
journal. David is implicitly constructing himself as an interested researcher or scholar, rather than as a supervised student. He is therefore suggesting that theirs is a relationship of mutuality, rather than of pushing and pulling.

David continues to argue against what he understands as Steven’s interpretation of the situation. He says ‘it’s not like pushing towards it it’s an obvious choice in that sense’ (lines 35 to 36; emphasis his own) and again uses the idea that publishing in this journal is ‘an obvious choice’ (see also lines 18 to 19: the word ‘it’ in this context refers to publishing in Discourse & Society). The expression ‘obvious choice’ is interesting for how it uses a notion of ‘choice’ while at the same time restricting the available options to a single journal. It is noteworthy that David does not mention any other journals which he might publish his work in during the interview. So, although David denies that publishing in Discourse & Society is like pushing towards, the notion of ‘choice’ which he employs is somewhat restrictive.

While David is quick to deny that Mick has pushed him towards publishing in Discourse & Society, David does not ‘push’ the notion of pushing completely out of his account. When he concedes or clarifies that ‘what’s being pushed towards is just the idea that I have to publish’ (lines 37 to 38) David retains the notion of pushing, but changes what is being pushed towards, along with the nature of the pushing itself. Firstly, he suggests that instead of being pushed towards publishing in Discourse & Society, he is being pushed towards just the idea of having to publish. Secondly, whilst earlier on there were ‘things’ pushing you towards it (lines 23 to 24), later there are no ‘things’ doing the pushing. David makes a grammatical shift from what was earlier the active voice (‘you know all those things which push you … towards it,’ lines 23 to 24) to the passive voice (‘what’s being pushed towards …’ line 37). Basically, it becomes even less clear who is being pushed towards, and crucially who or what is doing the pushing.

This kind of pushing seems different to the ‘proximal powers’ kind of pushing which was identified earlier, and instead seems closer to ‘distal powers.’ David does not say that there is anyone or anything pushing him towards publishing, such as his supervisor for example. Instead, it is as if the context of the situation is pushing him towards the idea that he has to publish. As Smail argues, distal powers are the kinds of powers which are difficult to identify, often not
thought about, and therefore difficult to speak of. The vagueness and lack of specificity about who is doing the pushing is suggestive of such 'distal' forces.

David mitigates the importance of this 'distal' pushing and also provides a justification for it. He says that what is being pushed towards is 'just the idea' that he has to publish. The word 'just' works here to depreciate the significance of the pushing towards, and functions in a similar sense to the word 'only' in the sense that any other things which might be being pushed towards are excluded (for more on the word 'just' see Weltman, 2003; on the rhetoric of the word 'only' see Billig, 1999a). David then defends this pushing towards, saying 'aannd ... after all that work I should really publish something from the PhD' (lines 38 to 39: emphasis his own). According to this reasonable form of justification, it is the amount of work that David has done on his thesis which is compelling him to publish. That is, rather than any influence from his supervisor, or any general institutional pressures. The justification comes instead from himself and from all the work that he has done.

While David suggests that he is free to publish in Discourse & Society, he also suggests that he is not free to not publish at all. He can choose which particular journal to publish in, but he cannot choose not to publish (for more on the pressures to publish doctoral work, see Fox, 1983, 1984). In this sense, David's autonomy is limited, but not only as a result of the supervisory relationship. While David denies that his supervisor has pushed him towards publishing in Discourse and Society, he concedes that the idea that he has to publish is being 'pushed towards.' But by whom or what, and how so, is left unsaid.

(iii) Power, Trauma and Becoming Disillusioned

In this final section of the chapter, we will turn away from those respondents who appeared either generally contented with their experience as doctoral students, or alternatively somewhat ambivalent, and instead look briefly at a case in which a doctoral student claims to have had 'a few problems' with her PhD. This is a story in which the student in question - 'Anna' - claims to have come close to leaving her course of doctoral study, for reasons which we will explore presently. In this
section we will consider the phenomena of disillusionment with the doctoral or academic experience, and its association with issues of power and trauma.

I have chosen to write this analysis as a narrative individual case study. Whereas in previous sections and chapters I have worked intensively with singular extracts, I will instead attempt to 'tell the story' of my encounter with Anna. I will draw upon Anna's own words, preserving their initial contexts of use as is appropriate for discourse analysis, but through a written narrative rather than presenting extended transcripts of dialogue. The reasons for this are threefold: First, I wanted to condense around sixty minutes of interview material into a single short section of analysis. Anna's interview seems to comprise many, if not all, of the issues we have been investigating so far in the analytic chapters, and so it seems appropriate to give a sense of the encounter as a whole in one final descriptive commentary. Secondly, a narrative approach seems to be better at articulating the 'mood' of an encounter, say, compared with a more technical turn-by-turn analysis (see, for example, the shift of register in chapter 7). Thirdly, and no doubt more controversially, the necessity for a detailed discursive-ideological analysis seems to lessen as the workings of power become more obvious and blatant. One of the main aims of an ideology critique is to expose the workings of power, and therefore it seems somewhat unnecessary to go into the detail on a case in which power is so clearly at issue (although see the recent debate in the pages of the journal Discourse and Society: Schegloff, 1997; Wetherell, 1998; Schegloff, 1998; Billig, 1999b; Schegloff, 1999a; Billig, 1999c; Schegloff, 1999b).

Preparing a poster presentation

At the time of interview, Anna was a 27 year old doctoral student, studying psychology at a new university. Anna was in the second year of her doctorate, and on the day I visited her, in June 2001, she was in the middle of writing an abstract for a poster presentation, which she hoped to present at a conference taking place in September. Anna told me that she was not entirely sure whether her supervisors would be 'particularly amenable' to her attending this conference, however, because she had had 'a few problems' with her PhD lately. As such, it was 'fifty fifty' as to whether they were going to be supportive of her going or not, and she
had ‘just gotten on and done it really.’ Soon after, Anna said that this issue was the ‘main thing’ for her at the moment; for today, it was ‘pretty much at the forefront’ of her mind. The abstract was sent off to them now, she said, and they can talk amongst themselves, and decide what they want to do.

It appeared as though I had met with Anna at a particularly sensitive moment. She seemed to be struggling with a live issue relating to her academic autonomy, which in turn reflected broader, more troubling issues relating to her overall experience as a PhD student. From the beginning of the interview until the end, we find Anna attempting to describe and make sense of a variety of different ‘doctoral dilemmas,’ many of which relate to the ‘crisis of confidence’ which she said she experienced towards the end of the first year of her PhD. Although Anna implies that this crisis has been central to her recent life as a doctoral student, there nevertheless appears to be a lack of clarity or coherence about how she describes it. As we might expect from a discourse analysis perspective, there is a degree of variability in Anna’s descriptions of her ‘crisis.’ Indeed, Anna does not, or cannot, seem to articulate precisely what this crisis was about.

**Different versions of the crisis of confidence**

At the beginning of the interview, Anna said that about six months ago she had ‘a bit of a crisis in terms of the confidence’ she had in the methodology she was employing for her PhD. While she started off doing qualitative analysis, and enjoyed doing the interviews, enjoyed doing the analysis, ‘there was no agreement between me and my supervisors over the themes.’ There was quite a lot of discrepancy and ‘arguments I s’pose’ over what she was finding. The lack of agreement, discrepancies and arguments between Anna and her supervisors might have arisen as a result of her being supervised by more than one person. Anna said that she had three supervisors: two supervisors and a Director of Studies. While she has to meet with them formally about three times a year, her Director of Studies prefers them to meet together all the time, or as much as possible. Anna said that it was an ‘absolute nightmare’ trying to get four people (herself and her supervisors) to agree on anything. She said that she doesn’t feel comfortable with this; she would much prefer to meet with one person, or at the most two other
people (on the dilemmas of having more than one doctoral supervisor, see Phillips and Pugh, 2000, pp. 116 – 118).

Anna went on to say that, in the end, she switched emphasis. Well, she had a ‘huge paradigm shift I spose’ from doing qualitative work to refocusing the emphasis of her PhD onto quantitative methods. She started using vignettes and questionnaire surveys, which she is making more progress with, and which her supervisors feel more comfortable with.\(^{44}\) So everything has gotten back on track, but it has meant that she is ‘a little bit behind.’ Or her supervisors ‘see’ that she’s behind; Anna doesn’t necessarily agree with this. Nevertheless, as a result, they’re ‘quite cagy’ of her going to conferences and presenting her work, because they think that she should be starting to think about writing her thesis up, as she is over eighteen months in now.

Later in the interview, Anna said that she doesn’t know whether the ‘crisis of confidence’ was mainly with herself, with the supervisors, or with the methodology; ‘but whatever it wasn’t working.’ She says that when she had this crisis, her Director of Studies ‘hit the roof.’ She ‘absolutely hit the roof.’ Anna says that they had this one meeting where her Director of Studies was ‘very angry very emotional’ and told Anna that if she didn’t understand her point of view, there was ‘no way’ that she was going to consider being her Director of Studies anymore. Basically, if she didn’t agree with, or ‘shut up and listen to what I’m saying’ then Anna was not going to be doing the PhD. Anna says that part of her Director of Studies’ rationale for this was that time was passing, and that she wasn’t going to finish within the three years. Anna says that in her annual report it mentions that although she has done ‘a lot of work,’ she still has an ‘uphill struggle’ to face before completion. Anna remarked that this is a ‘horrible thing’ to say to someone, especially when you’re facing the remainder of your data collection, analysis, and writing up.

\(^{44}\) The direction of Anna’s ‘switch’ or ‘huge paradigm shift’ from qualitative to quantitative research is interesting because it seems to be the reverse of the usual ‘paradigm shift’ experienced in social psychology. Often it is the student working within a quantitative paradigm who switches to doing qualitative research. Anna, however, says that she enjoyed doing the qualitative work, and suggests that the switch was occasioned by the lack of agreement, discrepancies and arguments between her and her supervisors over what she was finding. While Anna says that her supervisors feel more comfortable with this new quantitative emphasis, she does not say the same of herself.
According to Anna’s first version of the crisis, which she gives at the start of the interview, it is the lack of agreement, discrepancies and arguments over her qualitative themes which appear to result in her having a ‘crisis of confidence.’ When she comes to tell her second version of the crisis, later in the interview, however, Anna claims not to know what her crisis was about: she says she does not know whether the crisis of confidence was with herself, her supervisors, or with the methodology, ‘whatever it wasn’t working.’ Indeed, it is unclear from what Anna goes on to say about her meeting with her Director of Studies exactly what the issue is. Although there is a concern about Anna not being able to finish her PhD in time, the actual nature of the problem or ‘crisis’ is left unsaid.

It could be that the variability and confusion in Anna’s descriptions of her crisis is a result not only of the action orientation of talk (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), and the contrary nature of ideology and common sense (Billig et al., 1988), but also because of the ‘traumatic’ nature of Anna’s crisis. There is a sense in which Anna has experienced ‘trauma and distress’ similar to the kind Alison Lee and Carolyn Williams (1999) discuss in their paper ‘Forged in Fire.’ Lee and Williams argue that the process of attaining an academic identity through the doing of a doctorate is often characterised by trauma, contradiction and ambivalence. One form of doctoral trauma is the ‘trauma of supervisory abandonment’ which comes as a result of relinquishing student dependency in favour of academic autonomy. In the present episode, Anna’s trauma is not associated with supervisory abandonment, but rather with what she describes as her ‘crisis of confidence’ and the implied abuse of power on the part of her Director of Studies.

The ‘unknowable’ quality of Anna’s crisis gives the impression that it is something traumatic or distressing. Indeed, my interview encounter with Anna became something of a ‘therapeutic hour’ in the sense that it unintentionally resembled what Steiner Kvale (2003) has termed ‘psychoanalytically inspired academic interview research’ (p. 280). As I attempted to listen and understand what Anna was telling me, and as she described and redescribed her problems, so she was attempting to reconstruct and make sense of what had happened to her. By repeatedly revisiting her ‘crisis’ Anna might have been attempting to make ‘known’ something which was, in a sense, ‘unknowable.’
This unknowable quality also relates to the issues of blame and accountability. Throughout the interview, Anna attempts to identify the nature and cause of her crisis, and makes suggestions about who or what is to blame for what has happened to her. Often the responsibility is placed with her Director of Studies; towards the end of the interview Anna says that ‘I think most of the problem was with her.’ Rarely does Anna acknowledge the possibility that she might have been to blame for her crisis. In this sense, Anna’s claim of ‘not knowing’ may function rhetorically to direct the conversation away from acknowledging her own culpability for her crisis of confidence. Further analyses would be required to substantiate such psychoanalytic interpretations, however, drawing upon a ‘depth’ discursive psychology (see Billig, 1999a). Ultimately, the very identification of the ‘crisis of confidence’ is anything but a neutral affair.

**Afterward: dealing with the crisis**

Anna says that between November (2000) and the end of January (2001), she didn’t do any work. She did nothing. She even packed up her desk at the university and told her friends that she was leaving. But instead she decided to take Christmas off and see how she felt. In February, Anna said that she ‘backed down.’ She was like ‘right I don’t believe what I’m doin’ anymore I want a complete change of direction,’ and said that she knew that if she carried on, she wouldn’t get her PhD. In the end, she came to the decision that she would give it ‘one last shot,’ came back, and has been working ‘like a bugger’ ever since.

When I asked her whether she was ‘not too comfortable’ about the direction her thesis had taken, Anna replied that she was ‘now’ and that she’d ‘had a bit of a reality check’ because she was ‘very very idealistic’ when she started her PhD. Incredibly idealistic. She said that she had a very idealistic view of academia and academics and that this was ‘completely shattered’ in the first year of her PhD. It took her a long time to readjust and she says that, now, her approach to her research is ‘much more pragmatic.’ I asked Anna what being more pragmatic involves. She said that she expects less from her research, ‘a lot less.’ She had hoped to go on and present at a lot of conferences, be presenting at an international conference, and get publications out. She had probably hoped to go on and take up a research post after her PhD. But for her she has ‘just had to be
very sort've like, economical I spose with my aspirations for the future especially this next year when she has to start writing up, and basically finish her PhD in three years. She said that she had taken her emotions out of it, 'it's work it's a job.' Later in the interview, Anna said that her expectations are now 'just to produce a PhD thesis.' Whereas before it was more of a 'personal piece of work, a creative endeavour,' it's not anymore.

When I asked her what she thought academia was going to be like. Anna said 'oh I think I'm a right old socialist.' She says that she thought it would be a lot of people working on research that they loved, that there would be collaborative research projects research students could get involved in, and also that there would be research seminars. She says that 'it was just an overly romanticised view' and that when she got 'here' she began to realise that this wasn't what academia was about. In her university department, people 'just seem to lock themselves in their rooms' – you're very lucky if you see most people. People don't seem to be interested in what she or anyone else is doing. Anna says that she was 'completely taken aback' by this. When she started her thesis Anna says that she was very passionate about pursuing ideas and expressing them freely, and that she expected to have three years and 'everyday I'd be able to do research that I love.' However, she found that this was not the case; it's very much that you're doing what somebody else wants you to do. And if you don't do that, you get effectively punished, or brought into line.

Naturally, when asked whether she considers herself an academic, Anna replied with an immediate 'no' followed by 'absolutely not.' Nevertheless, she went on to say that she loves research, and that she hopes to go on and do some kind of research based job. Preferably not in a university, but if it has to be within a university environment, she would rather work as a Research Associate or Research Assistant. This is because she doesn't want to get involved in 'the politics.' She envisages something tied to a pre-defined project because 'the more responsibility you get the more involved with the politics you get.' She had thought of maybe working for the women's section at the cabinet office; she has a friend who works there.

At the very end of her interview, Anna remarked that there is 'no way' that she would want to be a lecturer or submit herself to this kind of an atmosphere ever again.
Concluding summary

This analysis has attempted to illustrate the trauma that can occur when the doctoral experience almost breaks down, possibly as a result of a superior’s abuse of power, and through an exposure to a cold departmental or institutional climate. These kinds of experiences may result in doctoral postgraduate students becoming disillusioned with academic life. But doctoral disenchantment is unlikely to be complete and total. After all, Anna was not entirely overtaken by pragmatism. She retained her sense of being ‘a right old socialist’ and attested to her ‘love of research,’ as well as maintaining a critical spirit. Thus PhD students may preserve their aspirations of the scholarly life further into their futures. It is in this respect, however, that the dilemmas do not end here, with doctoral postgraduates becoming lecturers, or choosing to abandon the academy altogether. For the old dreams and fantasies may stay with them, troubling their relationship with the present, as they begin to negotiate the new dilemmas of being autonomous, ‘doctored’ individuals.
Chapter 9 – Conclusion

At the beginning of the thesis I talked about the kinds of responses that I have tended to get from people when I tell them what my PhD is about. One of the best replies I’ve received after telling someone that I’m doing a PhD on the dilemmas of doing a PhD is ‘will it ever end?’ A PhD has the potential to be never-ending in the sense that the author may be so affected by the dilemmas of doing a doctorate that they do not write, or are unable to finish. Indeed, for some PhD students their doctoral dilemmas are all-encompassing and result in them withdrawing, or not completing their studies. Little could be more tragic or ironic than a PhD student being unable to complete their PhD on the dilemmas of doing a PhD. Thankfully, this conclusion chapter signals the end of the present thesis, and indeed the end of my present life as a doctoral student. The chapter looks back on the thesis as a whole, and considers what has been lost and found in the present work, how the findings of the thesis can be applied to itself, and where the study of social science doctoral work might go from here.

The present thesis has sought to offer a critical analysis of the dilemmas of doing a doctorate in the social sciences from the perspective of discursive psychology, complementing and extending qualitative work in the sociology of education on doctoral research and training. It has focused on how doctoral identities and experiences are discursively and rhetorically constructed, and how they come to be informed by wider ideological values. It has also analysed the different forms of power at play in doctoral research, from the subtle to the more blatant, through a detailed analysis of how doctoral postgraduates talk about their experiences of publishing and their relationships with their supervisors. In general terms, the thesis has presented critical, discursive, and reflexive analyses as an argument against descriptive, policy oriented, and supervisory forms of writing on doctoral education.

The study has also brought attention to, and in turn problematised, the role of the researcher in studies of doctoral education, and the relationship between researcher, topic, method, and participants. Whereas most studies of doctoral education have been carried out by doctoral supervisors and established academic researchers, the present work has been carried out by a doctoral student during the
course of their doctoral studies. It is in this sense that the thesis has been implicitly reflexive throughout, in that its arguments and findings are applicable as much to itself and to its author as they are to its object of analysis. A doctorate on doing a doctorate is just as susceptible to the dilemmas of doctoral work as any other doctorate, as we shall see. In a more explicitly reflexive sense, my own methodological and interviewing practices have been subject to analysis, along with the practices of my participants. Also some of the literature on doctoral study has been analysed for how the experience of doing a doctorate has been discursively imagined and negotiated by academic authors. As such, findings have not been kept entirely distinct from theory, method, or argument in the present work, as it seems that in the present context, any academic writing or practice relating to doctoral study can potentially become an object of enquiry or topic of study.

As a whole, and in the spirit of social critique or political intervention, the thesis has aimed to study doctoral dilemmas rather than supervisory dilemmas, thereby reflecting the interests of students rather than supervisors, and has introduced the critical concepts of discourse, ideology, and power to the study of these dilemmas, which are mostly absent from previous studies in the field. Whereas it is often claimed that reflexivity is politically problematic in social research – in part because it is believed to entail a relativism where one is unable to take a stand or follow through with an argument (the researcher having no grounds to stand upon) – the present work has shown how reflexivity can be part of a political critique of research in higher education, a genre of work where academics routinely fail to investigate their own conditions of existence (cf. Ashmore, 1996).

Central to the analytic chapters of the thesis has been a concern with the topic of doctoral postgraduate and academic identities. The aim has been to give a ‘snapshot’ of contemporary young academic identity work: the ways in which doctoral postgraduates construct themselves, and are in turn constructed, as both academics and non-academics. There has been a concern to show how the

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45 For example, Parker (1992) has claimed that ‘in order to analyse institutions, power and ideology, we need to stop the slide into relativism’ (p. 22). Ashmore (1989), Edwards, Ashmore
rhetorical, interactional, and ideological dilemmas of identity work come to be played out and negotiated in sequences of conversational interaction. Rather than treating identities as pre-given, the analysis has focused upon respondents’ identity practices as they are displayed in their talk. In particular, the question of whether doctoral postgraduates consider themselves to be academics has been of interest. Indeed, this concern has been reflected across the analytic chapters. It is apparent that none of the interviewed postgraduates considered this question straightforward or the answer self-evident. Participants did not uniformly say that they felt, thought, or considered themselves to be, or be becoming, academics. Instead, they displayed various degrees of consent and resistance and acceptance and rejection to the processes of academic identity formation. Their replies varied, for example, depending upon the degree to which they were favourably oriented to an academic identity and considered it to be desirable, and/or whether they could reasonably provide what they believed were appropriate evidential warrants to claim an academic status. Generally, when faced with their respective academic questions, respondents often implied that doing academic identity work was a fraught process. They did this through the difficulty which they sometimes displayed when answering their academic questions; their patterns of argumentation, justification, and dilemma management; and the ways in which their identities were sometimes shown to be implicated in wider ideological processes.

The analyses in chapters 5 and 6 demonstrated how postgraduate academic identity work is a rhetorical project, involving processes of argumentation and justification, as well as the negotiation of various interactional and self-presentational dilemmas. These themes were followed up in chapter 7, where the analytic focus was both narrowed and widened to encompass the local interactional contingencies of identity claims, and the wider ideological themes and dilemmas which can be negotiated in claiming an ‘ambivalent’ academic identity. The analysis in this chapter has implications for work on the ‘myths’ of academia and how academics and students relate with their present and past lives, revealing the ambivalences that are potentially involved in doing academic

identity work (Delamont, Parry and Atkinson 1998; Johnson, Lee and Green, 2000). The chapter also demonstrated how the identity work was found, in this instance, to involve the negotiation of contrary themes, relating to ideological values and university department hierarchies, in which there were differences of power and status. These were not overtly present in the talk, however, but were evident subtly and implicitly in the use of pronouns, for example. The analysis therefore demonstrated the value of looking at how ideology is reproduced in the detail of routine conversational interactions. This interest in the subtle forms of power and ideology in doctoral education was taken up in more detail in chapter 8, which we will return to below.

In the present thesis it has not been assumed that postgraduate students speak out of their identities as though their identities existed prior to them being invoked in spoken interaction. Nor has it been suggested that their identities can be taken for granted or assumed prior to analysis. Rather, it has been argued that postgraduates speak and are spoken by their identities; they actively construct them at the moment of utterance, but at the same time are constrained by what identities it is possible for them to claim, and by the contradictory themes of ideology and common sense that structure their thinking about themselves. The participants in this study were also making their identity claims in the context of interviews, in which they were asked questions that prompted them to do identity work, and established what was required and expected of them. In the content analysis in chapter 5, it was discovered that I as the interviewer displayed particular assumptions about the respondents through the kinds of questions I asked of them, which had consequences for the answers they subsequently gave. Through the asking of ‘academic questions’ it was implied that the participants were in fact not academics, or that there was a level of doubt and uncertainty about their actual status. For example, it was implied that some of the respondents might be ‘in-between’ in their identities and in the process of ‘becoming’ academics. It was also subtly suggested that an academic identity was something in need of justification or accounting, and that potentially unfavourable inferences could be made about a person who claimed an academic identity.

These findings have direct implications for studies of doctoral education where the questions that researchers ask their participants tend not to be presented or analysed along with the answers they give. We need to acknowledge how the
particular assumptions we make about our participants – as researchers, supervisors, or students – come to feed into our research studies, such that participants' accounts become constructed, through a process of argumentation with the assumptions that we display about them in our questions and prompts. The implication is not necessarily to not ask questions of our participants, moving to more 'naturalistic' modes of enquiry, but rather to interrogate the questions that we do ask, and try to understand how they are understood by our participants. What do our participants think they are doing in our studies? How do they display these understandings in their talk? And what are the implications for our findings? Small shifts in analytic emphases such as these might entail broader changes in how we conceptualise ourselves in our research, and our understandings of the impact that we have upon the phenomena we study.

Further reflexive implications arise from observations that were made in the thesis about power and ideology. It was highlighted in chapter 2 how researchers of doctoral education rarely investigate the patterns of power at play in doctoral study, sometimes acknowledging power, but rarely analysing it in detail. This lack of engagement with structures of power was made up for in chapter 8, where the subtle and hidden dynamics of power in doctoral education became the focus of analysis. It was found that, when liberal power is working successfully, it is often hidden and buried within discursive practices in complex and subtle ways. When doctoral research is 'going well' for example students will often speak of their supervisors as though they are 'friends' or 'colleagues' rather than unequal superiors. It was only in the subtle detail of spoken interaction that evidence of inequality was revealed, through the analysis of pronoun use, patterns of positioning, and accounting practices. Crucially, the ideology of supervision was found to soften or conceal the workings of liberal academic power. It was only when the supervisory relationship 'broke down' that the machinations of power became more visible.

These findings about the concealment of academic power can be applied just as easily to the research literature on doctoral study as they can to the phenomena of doctoral study itself. This is because in academic studies of doctoral education there is a tendency for authors to deny, hide, or push aside the inequality of the supervisory relationship, such that it appears as though power is literally 'not present' in liberal academic settings. Hiding of power might especially be
necessary in the liberal university, where values of democracy and egalitarianism exist, against a backcloth of institutional hierarchies and differences of power (Billig et al., 1988; Tracy, 1997). There might be a need to disavow power structures and ideological values, especially in formal research reports and written documents, because they threaten the egalitarian ethos of the liberal academy. Given that researchers of doctoral education tend to be supervisors, there is a sense in which the ‘absence’ of power in research studies might more accurately be an ‘avoidance’ or a ‘willed forgetting’ of the structures of domination that perpetuate their superiority over their students (Billig, 1999a). It is not surprising from this perspective that researchers of doctoral education tend not to study their own power, or the power that is involved in the relationships they are analysing, for in so doing they might actually weaken the hold of their supervisory power. In making power more visible, it becomes easier to identify and challenge: supervisors become ‘accountable.’

For the reasons outlined above, it appears doubly difficult to bring to the foreground patterns of inequality in higher education, because the hiding not only occurs at the level of the ‘phenomena,’ but also at the level of the ‘research’ that attempts to elucidate the phenomena. Indeed, there might even be a triple hiding occurring in the present context, for research which claims to expose power might itself be hiding power. In purporting to identify and reveal patterns of power, researchers often imply that their own words and the position(s) they occupy are without power. But a certain degree of power is necessary if one is to point to power elsewhere; personal and social resources must be drawn upon in order to see into power relationships and show how they work. As such, in revealing power, one can also be concealing it, whether it is one’s own power, the relationship(s) of power that one is working within, or even the power that one is hoping to reveal.

While in the present thesis the workings of academic power have been revealed, they have also been concealed. In attempting to address forms of power that previous studies of doctoral education have ignored, the thesis has also participated in the disguising of that power. Earlier in this chapter, it was claimed that ‘the present work has been carried out by a doctoral student during the course of their doctoral studies’ (pp. 200 – 201). Similarly, in the introduction to the thesis, it was implied that the present PhD on the dilemmas of doing a PhD was
conducted by an independent postgraduate author, the argument being that
doctoral research has so far been carried out mostly by supervisors and established
academics (pp. 2 – 3). But I am not the only person responsible for the work that
has been done in the present thesis. There is another hidden author, who has aided
and abetted me, but who cannot be fully acknowledged, less the argument of the
thesis, and indeed the status of the thesis as a thesis, is jeopardised. The person
with a hidden hand in the present work is my own doctoral supervisor, who has
been instrumental in the creation and development of the doctoral dilemmas
project, but who has not been credited as an official author of the thesis. The
shadowy figure of my supervisor appears alongside other academic authors in the
written text of the thesis – in references and citations – but never as a co-author.
His identity is revealed in the previous chapter, but only because the analysis
called for this identification. What is missing throughout are his supervisory
contributions – the comments, suggestions, alterations, corrections – which went
into the construction of the thesis as a whole. Indeed, the processes of my own
supervision as a doctoral student are completely absent from the surface of this
text, and only come through in implicit and subtle ways – in patterns of argument,
theorising, and analysis, and in certain stylistic features of the writing. This is
despite the fact that supervision was central to the processes of the production of
the thesis, and myself as a scholar, especially in the early stages of the work. The
supervisor might have disappeared from the text, then, but not from the practices
that produced the text.

It is evident that my supervisor is an ‘absent presence’ or a ‘buried presence’
in this written thesis, and the traditions of academic writing work to hide his
scholarly contributions. The metaphor of the supervisor being ‘buried’ in the
doctoral thesis is appropriate in this context for at least two reasons. Firstly, as I
have suggested, there is a sense in which the supervisor’s contributions cannot be
fully revealed in the text of the doctorate, else the thesis itself runs the risk of
being comprised. The central fiction of doctoral study is that the student is
working ‘alone’ and is producing autonomously original work, not collaborating
on a project with a senior academic figure. Any thoroughgoing acknowledgement
of the co-produced nature of the thesis threatens the autonomous originality of the
work, and the identity of the independent thesis student (Hockey, 1994). Thus, the supervisor needs to be kept ‘below deck’ while the student captain steers the good ship ‘thesis’ for all those on land to see. Indeed, in the present context, it is essential that the supervisor stays below deck, in order that the argument of the ‘doctoral dilemmas’ thesis itself can actually work. For it has been suggested that a doctoral student, rather than a doctoral supervisor, needs to carry out a study of doctoral education, thereby challenging existing work in the field.

There is a further reason why the ‘burial’ metaphor is appropriate in the case of doctoral thesis preparation and supervision. This is because in a literal sense the supervisor has to ‘disappear’ from the student’s life in order for the student to become a properly autonomous academic. The ultimate goal of doing a doctorate is for the student to develop to the point where they can carry out research or scholarship on their own. Until then, the supervisor is both an enabling and constraining force in the student’s life, allowing them enough autonomy to do the work that is required to produce a doctoral thesis, but not complete freedom. Thus, from a psychoanalytic perspective, there might be a desire on the part of the student for the supervisor to be dead and buried, or at least forgotten. The student wishes either to be their own supervisor, supervising themselves and other students, or what the supervisory figure represents, i.e., the independent academic. In preparing their thesis, the individual doctoral student prepares to become autonomous. And just as their name appears on the spine of the bound PhD thesis, so their supervisors’ name does not appear. Thus, as the student is remembered and affirmed, so the supervisor is forgotten and disregarded. The student lives on through their thesis work, but the supervisor disappears, and must disappear from the work, if it is to be considered the student’s own.

Just as no argument is inherently ideological, so no research approach is inherently emancipatory. The workings of power are never completely revealed. The present doctorate on doing a doctorate has both concealed and revealed the hidden hand of supervision and academic power. As such, it both resists and

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46 After all, at the front of this thesis is a statement of originality, which guarantees that the thesis comprises my own work, and the spine and front cover include the name Steven Stanley only, which suggests that I am the sole author.
reproduces the power dynamics and ideological values involved in the doing of a doctorate in the social sciences.

*

In the introduction it was claimed that the present thesis seeks to contribute to knowledge, especially knowledge in the sociology of education. There is a sense in which this is wishful thinking, however, for the knowledge that is produced in a doctoral thesis will not necessarily go any further than the thesis itself. The relationship between a PhD thesis and the wider scholarly community is often fractured, in the sense that the networks of distribution are not in place, such that a PhD thesis will be read by an academic audience. Doctoral theses are not automatically put on sale in academic book shops, advertised in academic journals, or placed on-line to be accessed by an electronic readership. Rather, they are placed in the libraries of their host institutions, often separated off from other academic works. The way they are bound and presented, and indeed the way they are written, often makes them unappealing and inaccessible to even the most academic of readers. As such, there is a certain amount of deception involved in the PhD writing process. While the whole raison d’etre of the doctoral thesis is to make an original contribution to knowledge, the actual processes of knowledge circulation seem to come to a halt, once the thesis has been submitted and put onto a library shelf, ready to collect dust. The successful PhD candidate may go on to publish from their thesis, or distribute parts of the project to interested friends and colleagues, but they are not required to do so.

In the introduction to this thesis, and indeed in this very conclusion chapter, it was suggested that the present thesis is a ‘doctoral thesis’ sitting in a library waiting to be read by some unsuspecting reader. At the time of writing, however, this thesis is not a doctoral thesis. It is just a collection of chapters on a computer, waiting to be printed out and bound. The workings of academic power are required to turn this document into a doctoral thesis, and indeed to turn the author into a ‘Doctor of Philosophy.’ And so it is that I now turn to the primary audience of the thesis, the examiners, who will decide whether or not this is, in actual fact, a PhD thesis.
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<td>Yoko</td>
<td>40</td>
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</tr>
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Appendix B – Letter of Introduction

13th December 2001

Dear doctoral student,

Hello, my name is Steven Stanley. I am a second year Ph.D. student from the Department of Social Sciences at Loughborough University. My doctoral thesis, which is sponsored by the E.S.R.C., is about the experiences and views of doctoral students in psychology, sociology and the social sciences. I would very much appreciate your participation in this research project.

Presently, I am visiting universities in the East Midlands and North West regions of the United Kingdom. I have been doing conversational interviews with doctoral students to find out about their experiences of doing doctoral research and their views on academia more generally. These conversations have been informal, and led by the interests of the respondents themselves. On average, the interviews have lasted around 45 minutes. Several of my respondents have appreciated being given the opportunity to speak in confidence about their lives as doctoral students. I will of course be respecting the anonymity of all my participants.

If you would like to take part, or if you have some questions you would like to ask me, then please send me an email. My address is s.stanley@lboro.ac.uk. If you would prefer, you could give me a ring at home, on 01509 561 908.

Thank you for reading this letter, and for taking an interest in my project.

Yours faithfully,

Steven Stanley.

Postgraduate Research Student
Department of Social Sciences
Loughborough University
Loughborough, Leicestershire.
LE11-3TU.
Appendix C – Interview Schedule I

Ethics

How long in higher education?

Why did you want to do a PhD?
How did you find out about the position at [University]?
How were you funded?

What was your topic?
How was that chosen?
Did the topic change over time?

How did you find the writing?
Could you express your ideas — any constraints?

Any changes in approach/view of research?
How long did it actually take?
When was your viva?

You have done some teaching ...
Your position in department re: teacher/researcher

You said you've got a job at ...
Do you consider yourself an academic?

Published?
When was the first one done?
Whose idea to publish?
How did you manage the work?
More ordering?

Important to publish/pressure to publish?

Hopes for future.
Appendix D – Interview Schedule II

Interview

(Say a few words about ethics)

How old are you?
And how long have you been in academia?
Have you done any previous degrees?

How did you find out about this university?
What department are you in?
How are you being funded?
What year are you in?

What is your PhD about?
How was your topic chosen?
Were you constrained in any way, in terms of what you could do?

What are you doing right now?
How are you finding the writing?
Do you find that you're able to say what you want to say?
Has your topic changed since you started?

Did you have any ideas about what a PhD would be like?
Are you free to do what you like?
Did you have to take any courses?

Have you ever published any of your work?
How did that come about?
Did you find that you could say what you wanted to say?
Do you think it's important to publish?
Are you more concerned about publishing now than you were before? i.e. first and second years.
Would you say there is a pressure to publish?

I often get asked the question 'so what are you going to use your PhD for?'
Do you have any kind of career plans?
Do you like academia?
Would you say you are becoming an academic?
So do you want to stay in academia?
Appendix E – Interview Schedule III

Interview

Anonymity, confidentiality and withdrawal

Beginning

How long have you been in academia?
What previous degrees have you done?
Why are you at The University of...?
How did you find out about the doctorate opportunity here?
How are you being funded to do this research?
What is the topic of your thesis?
How was this topic chosen?

Middle

What year are you in?
What stage are you at at the moment?
How is it going?
Has your topic changed in any way?
Do you have freedom to pursue your own ideas?
Did you have any expectations about what it would be like to do a doctorate?
Have you changed as a person whilst you have been doing your doctorate?
Do you consider yourself an academic?

End

Have you published any of your thesis work?
How did that/those come about?
Have you started to write up?
When do you intend to finish?
What are your plans for the future?
How old are you?
Appendix F – Transcription Notation

The transcription notation used in this study is a simplified and modified version of the system developed by Jefferson (1984a) for conversation analysis.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Notation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>(0.7)</td>
<td>Pauses appear in rounded brackets and are measured in tenths of seconds. Pauses lasting for 0.5 seconds or less are marked with (.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(yes)</td>
<td>Minimal acknowledgement tokens by speaker (usually the interviewer) during an interlocutor’s turn also appear in rounded brackets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>((smiley voice))</td>
<td>Commentary appears in double rounded brackets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a career [at all]</td>
<td>Overlap is indicated by square brackets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[oh yeah]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I- we</td>
<td>The abrupt cutting off of a word is marked with a dash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>twice</td>
<td>Speaker emphasis is indicated with italics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERM</td>
<td>An increased in volume is indicated with capitals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>woHHrk</td>
<td>Within-speech or interpolated laughter is marked with capital aitches (see Jefferson, 1985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Questioning intonation is indicated by a question mark</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Sigmund Freud: Volume XI: Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Leonardo
Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis.

The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis.


Hall.

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–242.


Higher Education, 26 (1), 85 - 94.


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September 2004].

analysis from a feminist perspective. In S. Wilkinson and C. Kitzinger, Eds.,
Feminism and Discourse: Psychological Perspectives. London: Sage.

Books.

Harmondsworth: Penguin.


Acknowledgements

I have been helped and supported by so many people along the way that it is difficult to remember everyone. If I have missed you out, then I apologise.

Firstly I must thank Mick Billig for being such an inspirational supervisor. Thank you for your constant support and unfailing interest and enthusiasm in my work, or at least for disguising your boredom with what I had to say. While I often came to you feeling despondent, I always left feeling exhilarated. Thank you for your ideas, the many touch ups, for fixing my bike, and for not making my life hell like you said you would. I will miss you.

Thank you to the participants in this study, who literally made everything happen. If it wasn’t for you, I would have no thesis. I hope that I have not ruined your sense of self-identity. Especially thank you to Will for his fascinating and funny interview.

To the ESRC I would like to extend my thanks for giving me enough money to just about survive for the first three years of my PhD. My award number is R42200034398 if you want to deduct anything from me for being rude to you in chapter 2.

I forgot to thank Jill Arnold at The Nottingham Trent University in my undergraduate dissertation for helping me to get my first degree in psychology. (I didn’t know you could put an acknowledgements section in it). Please forgive me and thank you for being the first teacher and scholar I ever looked up to. Can I be a feminist now?

Alexa Hepburn, thank you for suggesting that I should do a PhD in the first place and for giving me helpful advice about the said undergraduate dissertation. I have really appreciated your support over the years. Also I want to thank Jonathan Potter for his excellent suggestions on how to get a job.

For making my time at Loughborough so memorable I would like to thank Alastair Gordon. His camaraderie and razor sharp (and often offensive) humour kept me on my toes and stopped me from becoming too complacent. Thank you for all the lifts to Nottingham and for inspiring me to keep on playing music. Rock on!
Also in the ‘class of 2000’ was Merran Toerien, who is surely one of the warmest and most friendly people I have ever met. Thank for the long intellectual discussions and for listening when times were hard. Please slow down though.

Claudia Mastache was my next door neighbour with a special soul.

Richard Carmichael and Cristian Tileaga were briefly my office mates. Thank you Richard for not coming in very much, and thank you Cristian for having a positive influence on my working life.

The central hub of the Department of Social Sciences at Loughborough is surely located in Deirdre Lombard’s office. I really appreciated being able to come in and chat and have a laugh with you. Thank you also for me giving support at a distance in the final stages. I am sorry for not sending you a postcard from Cardiff. Will this do?

While I’m on the subject of the department, thank you to the Discourse and Rhetoric Group for providing such an inspiring environment and a supportive context in which to do my PhD. Thank you especially to Derek Edwards, Clare MacMartin and Liz Stokoe for their helpful comments on early versions of analytic chapters, and also to Malcom Ashmore for reflexive support and the word ‘doctored.’ I honestly wish I had discovered reflexivity earlier.

Thank you also to Orit Alfi, Kelly Benneworth, Steve Brown, Jovan Byford, Elio Castellana, Lisa Chen, John Cromby, Jan Flaherty, Mandi Hodges, Maria Kontogianni, Kyoko Murakami, Camilla Nordberg, Ben Oldfield, Michelle O’Reilly, Akihiko Sato, Ximena Tocornal, Sally Wiggins, Emma Vine, and Ferruh Yilmaz, who each made their own impression on me and influenced my work in different ways.

Away from Loughborough, and from my academic life, I would like to thank the many friends that I’ve neglected over the years, especially Craig Ashby, Chris Beckett, Carly Collingwood, Barry Paul Horrell, Neil Johnson, Tianna Kennedy, Paul Morgan, Ross Nisbett, Mark Poole, Hayley Roberts, Phil Welding, and David Weltman. Thank you for keeping me healthy, playing music, and generally giving me some semblance of a life over the last four years. I’m free!

My new academic home, the Cardiff School of Social Sciences, has been such a terrific environment for me to finish my thesis in. I would like to acknowledge especially the support of Valerie Walkerdine and Sara Delamont.
Also Matthew Williams has been the best office mate I could have hoped for. Thank you for being my muse.

Renee Lertzman is my special friend and girlfriend who has given me a great deal of love and support over the last year. Thank you for being so patient and for understanding even when I didn’t deserve it. I will now say yes to everything.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my family. My mother Shelley Stanley, grandparents Elsie and John Minshall, my aunt Pat Gillies, and cousin Jayne Martindale have all believed in me, and given me much appreciated emotional and financial support and encouragement over the many years that I have been educating myself. At last, I’ve finished! None of it would have been possible without you.

Finally thank you to Tilly for keeping me company during the final stages. I’m sorry I couldn’t play with you whilst writing this.