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UNEASY FEELINGS: QUEER(Y)ING THE AFFECTIVE-POLITICS OF DOCTORAL EDUCATION

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**Abstract**

In this thesis I recognise doctoral education as an international practice that is under pressure and experiencing significant change. Over recent decades public interest in the doctorate has expanded as it has become re-framed as a key component of national success in the global knowledge economy. Accompanying this increasing interest has been a series of changes to the doctorate itself that have produced a climate of increased regulation, intensified responsibility, and growing surveillance.

While researchers have explored recent transformations to the practice of doctoral education (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2015; Lee & Aitchison, 2009), often such work is motivated to develop pedagogies to support students to meet the new expectations that have arisen. At this point, there has been limited attention to what broad changes to the meanings and practices of doctoral education feel like for students, and a wider conceptualisation of the affective-political dimensions of doctoral education remains undeveloped. It is into this gap that my thesis enters.

In order to offer richer accounts of the felt experience of doctoral education, I analyse an eccentric collection of texts, each of which offers a contextually different angle. The texts I have selected include images from an online photo blog, autoethnographic self-reflection, as well as a qualitative study conducted with 10 doctoral researchers in faculties of Arts and Education at a university in Aotearoa New Zealand. The empirical study involved diary-interview method, and a residential writing retreat that produced verbal and visual data.
A key contribution this thesis makes is to bring conceptual resources associated with queer cultural studies (Berlant, 2011a; Halberstam, 2011; Jagose, 2010; Pausé, Wykes & Murray, 2014) into play with empirical accounts of doctoral education. I deploy queer conceptual figurations in order to interrogate normative accounts of the intersections between doctoral education, affect, and the political. The significance of this queer theoretical analysis is that it troubles common sense modes of recognising which affective or political practices may be constraining, and which might open onto possibility for action in the present.
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In Aotearoa New Zealand, I began my thesis in Dunedin as I was working for the Otago University Student’s Association. I thank my former colleagues at the
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Publications drawn on in this thesis


Acronyms and abbreviations

BMI  Body Mass Index
CV   Curriculum Vitae
DSW  Doctor of Social Work
EdD  Doctor of Education
GPA  Grade Point Average
HDR  Higher Degree Research
HEI  Higher Education Institution
ID   Identity
ISI  International Scientific Indexing
LGBT Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender.
NYU  New York University
NZ   Aotearoa New Zealand
OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PBRF Performance Based Research Fund
PhD  Doctor of Philosophy
RDC  Research Degree Completion
TEC  Tertiary Education Commission
UK   United Kingdom
UNM  University of New Mexico
US   United States
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CHAPTER 1

THE AFFECTIVE-POLITICAL PRACTICE OF DOCTORAL EDUCATION

Introducing the study

This thesis examines the contemporary doctoral education experience, and explores how it may be researched and represented as an affective-political practice. It begins with the premise that doctoral education is a practice under pressure. Ongoing neoliberal transformation of universities has had a profound impact upon not only academic workers, but also their students. Doctoral researchers are under increasing pressure – to finish their PhDs faster, at the same time as publishing more ‘outputs’ that have a higher measurable ‘impact’ (Lee & Aitchison, 2009). Concern about the productivity of doctoral students has, in turn, led to increased regulation and growing surveillance. Added to this complex picture is a developing anxiety about undertaking a PhD when the conditions of academic work itself appear to be deteriorating, if there are available positions at all (Barcan, 2013). Together, these changes have profoundly shaped the affective experience of the doctorate, with increasing reports of stress and ill-being (Stubb, Pyhältö & Lonka, 2011). This thesis considers existing higher education research accounts of the affective-politics of the academic workplace, and extends these to reconsider the current conditions of doctoral education. My study draws on data gathered from an online photo blog which hosts pictures of fat doctoral graduates, autoethnographic writing practice and a small qualitative research project with 10 doctoral students in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) in order to offer fine grained accounts of the ‘felt experience’ (Cvetkovich, 2012b) of doctoral education in the present.
In addition to re-conceptualising doctoral education as an affective-political practice, the thesis uses queer concepts (Berlant, 2011a; Halberstam, 2011, Jagose, 2010) to interrogate higher education’s affective-political imaginary. In particular, this thesis is situated within queer and cultural studies debates about the politics of negative affect (Cvetkovich, 2012b; Love, 2007; Ngai, 2005), which have sought to ‘de-pathologise shame, melancholy, failure, depression, anxieties and other forms of “feeling bad”, to open up new ways of thinking about agency, change and transformation’ (Blackman, 2015, p. 25). Rather than seeing negative states of being as only consequences of social injustice, researchers using queer concepts have taken feeling bad as offering possible pathways for political work and social change. Equally, the political consequences of so-called positive affects, such as happiness (Ahmed, 2010) or optimism (Berlant, 2011a), have been closely scrutinised for their potential limitations.

I begin this chapter by considering the changing context of doctoral education, followed by a survey of a body of research that explores the emotional experience of the PhD. After this, I develop an account of the conceptual resources that form a foundation for my discussion throughout: affective-politics, affective practice and queer theory. In particular, I focus on exploring the contribution of scholars who have brought these concerns together, that is researchers who seek to ‘queer(y)’ (Gowlett, 2015) affective-politics. Following this, I practice some ‘uncomfortable reflexivity’ (Pillow, 2003) and discuss my variegated use of queer concepts in this thesis. I explain the conceptual tensions that have arisen in my own research practice where queer is sometimes more clearly connected to intellectual practices of subversion, and other times more invested in politics of visibility and equitable access. I conclude the introduction chapter with an outline of the organisation of the remainder of the thesis.
Setting the scene: The changing context of doctoral education

Doctoral education has a rich history stretching back to twelfth-century Europe (Wellington, Bathmaker, Hunt, McCulloch, & Sikes, 2005, p. 6), where the doctorate (from the Latin docere, “to teach”) was initially a license to instruct in a particular knowledge discipline. The contemporary research-based award, the PhD, originates from Berlin in the early nineteenth century, and was a product of a series of educational reforms that saw research and a dissertation positioned as the appropriate foundation for scientific training. The PhD subsequently spread from Germany to the United States (US) in the 1860s and was introduced to the United Kingdom (UK) in 1920 (Wellington et al., 2005, p. 6), quickly becoming a popular alternative to earlier doctoral awards. The PhD arrived to other settler nations after this, and was first offered in NZ in 1948 (Middleton, 2007).

While doctoral education in the mid-twentieth century might be characterised by rapid expansion and its close governance by fairly autonomous universities, by the end of the century the doctorate had been dragged ‘into the spotlight of public discussion and governmental concern’ (Boud & Lee, 2009a, p. 1). Historically understood as integral to the reproduction of disciplinary knowledge (Boud & Lee, 2009a), today the doctorate carries additional significance having become re-imagined by policymakers as a key contributor to national success in a competitive global economy (Tennant, McMullen, & Kaczynski, 2010). The doctorate is now expected to help secure the economic future of the nation by building human capital, and contributing to innovation (Bansel, 2011). This has meant that the ‘educational’ components of the doctorate have come into sharper focus, with increased requirements for research training programmes in order to equip ‘advanced knowledge workers’ (Lee & Boud,
Heightened interest in doctoral education is set in context by a number of other broad shifts that have transformed higher education institutions (HEIs) over recent decades\(^1\). Key trends here include massification (Pearson, 1999; Pearson, Evans & Macauley, 2008), internationalisation (Nerad, 2010; van der Wende, 2007), and managerialism (Bansel, 2011, Kenny, 2008). The movement of higher education from an elite to a ‘mass’ system and growing flows of international students have both led to a rapid global expansion of doctoral education. Taking the NZ context as an example, there has been a rising trend of doctoral enrolments since 2006 (NZ Ministry of Education, 2015. p. 3), with a surge of twenty percent from 2009-2014 alone. This growth has occurred without significant increases in the employment of academic staff to undertake the additional work, with a 19 percent increase in supervisory\(^2\) load from 2009-2014 (NZ Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 3). The expansion of doctoral education in NZ has meant that the demographic profile of today’s doctoral cohort is increasingly diverse. Since 2009, there have been increases in the participation of Māori and Pasifika\(^3\) students, with enrolments in both groups having risen over 20 per cent by 2014 (NZ Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 4). This steady rise in

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\(^1\) This term encompasses different types of institutions. In this thesis, it should be taken as primarily referring to universities that are concerned with both teaching and research.

\(^2\) The term ‘supervisor’ roughly equates to the role of ‘advisor’ in North American and other contexts. In NZ typically a doctoral student will receive supervision from at least two supervisors (with one being nominated as the primary supervisor) who will guide the student through the research process.

\(^3\) Māori are the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa NZ. ‘Pasifika peoples’ is a term widely used in NZ to describe communities who have migrated from the South Pacific Islands to NZ.
Māori and Pasifika doctoral enrolment may be explained, in part, by the double equity funding weighting given to research degree completions (RDCs) of traditionally under-served ethnic groups (Tertiary Education Commission, 2014, p. 10). In 2014 there were also more women than men enrolled to study doctorates, as well as a higher proportion of women graduating with doctorates than men. However, the key driver for expansion and diversification in NZ has been international students, with three times as many doctoral degrees completed by international students in 2014 than in 2009. Indeed, international students now comprise 44 percent of NZ’s total doctoral student population (NZ Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 3). This rapid increase in international enrolments stems from a 2006 policy change that saw international and domestic PhD students funded on an equal basis (NZ Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 3), and a subsequent levelling of domestic and international tuition fees. The increasing diversity of doctoral students in NZ, and elsewhere, has given rise to anxiety about the ‘quality’ of doctoral education. There has been concern expressed that students now come to doctoral study with more varied levels of academic preparedness and English language proficiency, a concern that has been heightened by a series of plagiarism scandals (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2015), and ongoing talk of a doctoral ‘literacy crisis’ (Lee & Aitchison, 2009, p. 88).

The changing cultural meaning of the doctorate, as well as its expansion and diversification, have also augured greater surveillance of the degree. This surveillance has been enacted as a part of a broader trend toward new managerialist models that have been imposed on universities and other public organisations, in what is sometimes called the rise of the ‘enterprise university’ (Bansel, 2011; Davies & Petersen, 2005a; Ditton, 2009; Sullivan & Simon, 2014). Increasingly, the ‘scientific-technical’ (Bansel, 2011, p. 546) approaches of
business management dominate, with a focus on ‘quality assurance, audit and evaluation [and]... metrics to determine both the value and impact of knowledge’ (Bansel, 2011, p. 546). Policy-makers increasingly speak about prudent financial management on behalf of ‘taxpayers’ (Cribb & Gewirtz, 2006), and rely on logics of ‘deliverables, economic bottom-lines and cost-benefit analyses’ (Bansel, 2011, p. 546). Institutions have also expanded their own accountability regimes to more closely follow the progress of students through their degrees (Blackmore, 2009; Cribb & Gewirtz, 2006). With growing doctoral enrolment and ‘fierce’ competition for academic and other professional employment (McWilliam, 2012, p. xvii), concern has also arisen about ‘what completed “doctors” will do in the future, and where they will work’ (Kamler & Thomson, 2014, p. x). Policy-makers and doctoral students alike are worried about ‘dismal academic job markets’ (Simpson, 2013, p. 228) and the appearance of ‘unemployment or under-employment among the most expensively trained and highest qualified of the workforce’ (Taylor & Beasley, 2005, p. 12). This, in turn, has prompted further measures of audit, such as ‘career destination league tables’ (Kamler & Thomson, 2014, p. x) to track the employment prospects of doctoral graduates.

Altogether, these changes have contributed to a profound unsettling of doctoral cultures and practice over recent times. Today’s doctoral students are called to think of themselves and their doctoral projects in new ways – ways that are ‘increasingly narrow, utilitarian and economistic’ (Lee, Brennan & Green, 2009, p. 276, see also Prasad, 2015). This has had resulting impacts upon the experience of doctoral degrees, which are arguably now more pressurised, audited, competitive and stressful (Divaris et al, 2012; Stubb, Pyhältö & Lonka, 2011).
In order to better understand how doctoral education feels in the present I have undertaken a review that considers the place of emotion in doctoral education literature more broadly. In the section that follows I will account for some of the ways in which doctoral emotion tends to be understood, and position the thesis in relation to these debates.

**Exploring doctoral emotion research**

While empirical research on doctoral emotions remains scarce, in general terms there are two broad ways in which emotions tend to be understood in doctoral education research, and the advice literature that many students call on to support their studies. The first is to frame emotions, and particular kinds of emotional performance, as a problem (Wellington, 2010) or pathology in the development of the ‘licensed independent scholar’ (Lee & Williams, 1999, p. 6). Such understandings often begin with the assumption that emotions ought to be absent, or at least carefully managed, so as not to cause a disturbance to the doctoral experience. The metaphors that tend to be used in these accounts configure emotions as blocks and obstacles (Ahern & Manathunga, 2004) that need to be overcome in order to become an effective doctoral student. This is a ‘rational and emotionless’ understanding of doctoral education that sits within broader discourses that tend to disassociate the properly ‘academic’ from the emotional and embodied (Hopwood & Paulson, 2012; Lynch, 2010; Mortiboys,

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5 See for example Joan Bolker’s *Writing your dissertation in 15 minutes a day* and its description of ‘dissertation paranoia’ (1998, p. 27), or Rudestam & Newton’s *Surviving your dissertation* (2001) which argues that it is important to be wary of emotions in topic selection. Students are advised they should ‘avoid topics that may be linked too closely with emotional issues in your own life [and/or]... a topic in which you have a personal axe to grind’ (2001, p. 10).
Within this discourse bodies are typically positioned outside of the PhD, and seen as largely irrelevant to the undertaking of doctoral research. For example, Peseta (2001) gives an account of the warning she received at the beginning of her doctoral experience that questions about whose body was imagined as ‘standard’ and ‘assumed’ (p. 85) within doctoral pedagogy (e.g. by ethnicity) were ‘unscholarly’ (p. 84) and ‘perhaps more appropriate to therapeutic discussion’ (p. 83). This understanding is present across cultures of education more broadly; as hooks (1994) notes institutional learning is often a ‘world’ where the body needs to be ‘erased’ and ‘go unnoticed’ (p. 191). This ‘rational’ way of knowing bodies and emotions has been criticised by feminist scholars who have identified the tendency to dichotomise ‘rational-man’ and ‘emotional-woman’, and argued that emotional and relational work is an inherent part of any research practice (Lee & Williams, 1999). Indeed, the idea of the independent doctoral scholar itself evokes an autonomous, masculine figure, who ‘is able to overcome supervisory neglect and indifference through intellect, perseverance and superior ability’ (Badenhorst, Moloney, Rosales, Dyer & Ru, 2015, p. 3). It is also an assumption that finds a happy marriage with neoliberal values such as self-resilience, and the responsibilisation of individuals (Badenhorst & Guerin, 2016; Hartman & Darab, 2012).

The studies in a second category of doctoral education knowledge have less of a pathologising focus, and are more concerned with understanding the emotional subjectivities of higher education’s inhabitants (Aitchison et al, 2012; Carter, 2011). For example, Lee and Williams (1999) argue that the emotional dimensions of doctoral candidature are necessary in the production of doctoral subjects. This is because the process of doctoral writing is transformative, not only ‘in the sense of developing our knowledge and understanding of a subject matter…it is
transformative of writers themselves’ (Starke-Meyerring, 2011, p. 80). One tendency is for doctoral education researchers to understand particular kinds of feeling as evidence of the natural struggles of doctoral identity work. For example, researchers might read feeling bad, or periods of emotional intensity, as a feature of the doctoral degree, where students are ‘not yet positioned as, and do not yet see themselves as fully fledged academics’ (Kamler & Thomson, 2004, p. 197), but who must work hard to ‘identify and master complex linguistic practices and position themselves as independent scholars in their discourse communities’ (Aitchison et al, 2012, p. 446). The stakes here are high, as Antoniou and Moriarty (2008) identify, ‘to write… is to make oneself visible, to expose one’s ideas and identity to public scrutiny’ (p. 165). Such accounts often look for continuities in doctoral emotions, noting for example, that doctoral writing tends to be structured by the ‘defensive’ positioning of doctoral students (Carter, 2011), or that the ‘careful and highly-substantiated thesis genre’ can lead to ‘tentative and sometimes highly anxious scholar identities’ (Kamler & Thomson, 2004, p. 198).

Accounts that take a broad view of emotions and the identity/textual work of the doctorate are useful for examining continuities of doctoral education. They account for the way that the PhD experience often has rhythms as particular steps are confronted – in social research these may include ‘stages’ of literature review, research design, data collection, and so on. The argument seems to be that these rhythms can give rise to certain overdetermined patterns of feeling, for example, the excitement that often accompanies the beginning of a PhD, or the stress that frequently accompanies its end. However, at their least helpful, these accounts can narrate predictable accounts of doctoral emotion, which can miss competing stories and the non-seamless, ‘complex, messy and not-always
rational’ (Bansel, 2011, p. 554) aspects of the doctoral experience. As I will illustrate in this thesis (Chapter 4) even something like the ‘failure’ to write can open onto a complex cascade of affects, and may open up counterintuitive political possibilities.

Additionally, and most importantly in the context of this study, by examining emotion within models of doctoral identity development these accounts are less resourced to offer temporal and political readings which might account for the features of doctoral education that have experienced significant change (for example, the rapid intensification of the doctorate, or the creep of surveillance culture). Answers to what doing a PhD feels like may be found by thinking about how the ‘literature review’ or ‘conclusion chapter’ tend to be experienced, or by tracing the socialisation and identity work that the degree demands, including the shift from novice-student to scholar (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Bosanquet & Cahir, 2015; Kiley & Wisker, 2009; Petersen, 2007). However, I am also suggesting that important information regarding the affective context of the PhD may be missed in such accounts. I argue that we also need studies that examine how the experience of doing doctoralness may have changed in recent years as a result of neoliberal reforms to higher education.

To date researchers have not substantially grappled with the changing conditions that doctoral education has been experiencing over recent times. Some writers have, for example, explored the intensified demands on doctoral students. But these studies have often focused on developing interventions designed to assist students to meet new expectations of quantity, dexterity and ‘impact’ regarding their writing outputs (Lee & Aitchison, 2009), rather than questioning the effects and affects of such increasing demands (for an exception
see Prasad, 2015). Perhaps then the biggest difference between my current study, and existing doctoral education research is that my interest is not in finding solutions to the ‘problem’ of teaching doctoral students how to be effective under the current conditions of the doctorate. I also do not seek to develop an intervention that might address the ‘problem’ of their unruly feelings about their doctoral experience. Instead, my focus is conceptual. I explore what happens when we take doctoral education as a rich and complex cultural site, and subject it to theoretical engagement and empirical study. I locate my discussion alongside doctoral education research that has critically explored how emotions are linked to relations of power (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Wall, 2008), and the consequences of neoliberal reform (Aitchison and Mowbray, 2015). Indeed, Aitchison and Mowbray’s (2015) article on the rise of the commercial ‘grey zone’ for postgraduate writing support services is an example of the kind of work I think is necessary in the field. The authors situate their research within the significant changes that have occurred to the postgraduate experience, arguing that funding cuts, shortened times for candidature, the ‘push to publish’ and the increased number of students who study in an additional language or at a distance all contribute to doctoral education becoming a ‘pressure point and a site of problem’ (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2015, p. 289). Crucially, it is doctoral education’s changing context that is identified as contributing to growing concern and anxiety.

In this thesis then, I argue that there has been insufficient conceptual consideration of doctoral education as a politically and affectively interesting practice. In order to address these gaps in the next section I turn to one promising approach for undertaking this project: affective politics.
Feeling, ordinary, now: The case for examining the affective and political together

In this thesis I make a case for examining doctoral education as an affective-political practice. In linking together affect and politics I am positioning emotions as not only psychological states that are contained within individuals, but as culturally generated phenomena that exist in social circulation (Abu-Lughod & Lutz, 1990; Ahmed, 2004a; Zembylas, 2007). Rather than badging the kind of thinking that has emerged following Deleuze – which tends to see affect as a ‘nonlinguistic, bodily “intensity”’ (Leys, 2011, p. 442) – affect is taken here to mean ‘embodied meaning-making’ (Wetherell, 2012, p. 4), ‘a category that encompasses affect, emotion, and feeling, and that includes impulses, desires and feelings that get historically constructed in a range of ways’ (Cvetkovich, 2012b, p. 4). My framing of affect in this thesis as social, economic and cultural is a deliberate attempt to ‘de-medicalise’ emotions ‘beyond an individual expression of psychopathology’ (Blackman, 2015, p. 25). Such an affective-political line of inquiry encourages greater curiosity about the neoliberal transformations to doctoral education and the consequences these have had in reshaping the emotional subjectivities of doctoral writers. It is a style of knowing that attends to how doctoral education feels in a context where students appear to be squeezed between competing demands for increased writing output on the one hand, and a compressed timeframe on the other. An affective-political practice approach encourages us to take seriously questions like ‘how do I feel?’ and ‘how does capitalism feel’ (Cvetkovich, 2012b, p. 5).

My desire to conceptualise is reflected in the subheading above. Feeling, ordinary, and now are a collection of the key words of this thesis. ‘Feeling ordinary’ speaks
to the conviction that exploring the ‘cultural politics of everyday [doctoral] life’ (Cvetkovich, 2012b, p. 3) is a critically productive avenue of enquiry. The ordinary is politically significant, because it is at the level of the everyday that the effects of power are surfaced and made tangible (Stewart, 2007). ‘Feeling ordinary’ is also a play on words. According to the Oxford New Zealand dictionary (Deverson & Kennedy, 2005), in its colloquial sense⁶ ‘ordinary’ can be taken to mean ‘poor’ or ‘below average’, which speaks to the gloomy mood that appears to hover around the intensified scene of doctoral education. ‘Now’ identifies the present-day as a fertile zone of cultural analysis, and also implies that something has changed with regard to doctoral education. This means that the stories that have been told about it need to be revisited.

After deciding to approach doctoral education as an affective and political practice, I set out to explore existing higher education research that has taken up this kind of enquiry. I found that an emerging body of research on the contemporary conditions of academic labour has offered some of the richest accounts of how the neoliberal university shapes the affective lives of its inhabitants⁷. Within current higher education debates, it is routinely observed that the neoliberal reconfiguration of universities has resulted in significant changes to the nature of academic work (Gottschall & Saltmarsh, 2016). The academic workplace has intensified with expectations of more teaching, more

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⁶ This understated usage of the word was often associated with the discussion of feelings during the period of my childhood in rural South Canterbury. A common answer to the question “How are you?” would be “pretty ordinary” if one was unwell, or otherwise feeling bad.

supervision, more research and more assessment of productivity\(^8\) (Bryson, 2004; Hartman & Darab, 2012; Houston, Meyer & Paewai, 2006; Pereira, 2016). As Barcan (2013) notes, these reforms have taken shape as a ‘super-adding of requirement after requirement, task after task’ (p. 6) which ‘has left academics unsure, confused, overburdened and – to put not too fine a point on it – wondering how much more work can be compressed into a week’ (p. 6). At the same time as workloads have increased, working conditions for many academics have become more precarious, with increasing casualisation and a resulting decline in pay and conditions (Gill, 2010). While admittedly work intensification, insecurity and poor remuneration are features not only of academia but many twenty-first century labour markets, this does not mean that their impacts on academics should be dismissed as the whinging of the comparatively affluent. In the first case, it is possible to be concerned about the labour conditions of workers from multiple industries simultaneously; indeed, the increasing precaritisation of academics may offer opportunities for such mutual care among workers, academic and non-academic. Secondly, we need to think carefully about the assumed economic privilege of academic workers. Yes – some academics may earn professional salaries and have relatively secure employment. But there is another tier of academic workers (Connell, 2013a) – often called casuals, adjuncts or contingent staff – who subsist on short-contracts with few of the benefits of their higher status peers. Thirdly, even among the tenured academic workforce, critics ought to resist the tendency to think too simply about how economic and social privilege structure the experience of

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\(8\) While it is important to point out the challenges that have arisen with the turn to performance measurement, we must also pay attention to their potentially positive effects also. For example, academic women could make the case for increasing transparency around performance requirements, which can be useful to track inequitable practices of academic hiring and promotion (see Davies, 2006).
academic work. While ‘tenure...clarity, flexibility and autonomy’ (Kinman, 2014, p. 219) have been identified as historically protective factors for occupational stress among academics, in the current higher education environment it appears:

there is a particular combination of work pressures faced by academics: work intensification and role confusion combine with the longstanding conception of academic work as a vocation and the current difficulty of acquiring full-time academic work to produce an especially potent recipe for professional disquiet and occupational distress (Barcan, 2013, p. 7)

Many tenured academics are not removed from worries – about publishing enough, or in the right journals, or making industry connections, or getting enough PhD completions, or good teaching evaluations (Sullivan & Simon, 2014), or just keeping their jobs in a time of straitened circumstances and widespread organisational restructuring (Kelly, 2015). Given this ‘potent recipe’ for unease, Barcan (2013) wonders if academics ‘as flesh-and-blood people can actually sustain the role of holding onto the past while embodying the future’ (p. 6), as it seems that to ‘embody the multiple spirits of the contemporary university, one would have to be something of a monster: the scholar-bureaucrat-entrepreneur’ (p. 91).

Increasingly, we do hear stories of flesh-and-blood academics buckling under this strain, with public and research accounts of overworked, stressed-out academics, and grim stories of burnout and emotional distress (Cvetkovich, 2012b; Gill, 2010; Petersen, 2011; Sparkes, 2007). For example, Cvetkovich (2012b) offers an account of her own depression, which is set in the context of the academy. In her memoir, felt experiences of stuckness and disappointment coexist alongside a feeling that ‘academia seemed to be killing me’ (p. 18). Cvetkovich (2012b) asks why ‘a position of relative privilege, the pursuit of
creative thinking and teaching, lived as though it were impossible?’ (p. 18). Together, these statements support the vision sketched by Roger Burrows (2012) of academia in the midst of a ‘deep, affective, somatic crisis that threatens to overwhelm us’ (p. 355). While I suspect Burrows intends his ‘us’ to speak to academics, it is a key argument of this thesis that this ‘us’ can be extended to include doctoral students as well.

Although the affective-political situations experienced by academics and doctoral students are clearly not identical, I am suggesting that we can hear resonances. Today’s doctoral students are also subject to increasing insecurity. For example, in NZ during the tenure of the current National-led government, there have been a series of policy reforms that have increased the conditions of vulnerability experienced by doctoral students. In 2011 the government passed the *Education (Freedom of Association) Amendment Act* to make the membership of student unions voluntary and to prevent them from directly levying students. This has had significant impacts on both financial positions and autonomy of students’ associations. With weakened student unions the government then implemented another significant policy in 2013, which ceased the payment of student allowances to postgraduate students. Before 2013 qualifying postgraduate students had been paid a living allowance, but following this reform even students part way through postgraduate study were forced to borrow for their living costs or take on part-time work. Unsurprisingly, reports have emerged of NZ postgraduate students ‘working long, minimum-wage hours, selling their cars and moving in with their parents to complete degrees’ (Mann, 2013). At the same time that they are being encouraged into more debt or squeezing in part time jobs, many doctoral students are already:
making agonizing personal risk/benefit calculations about how long to chance it in a system in which they have already invested a large portion of their young adult life but whose promises of return in the form of full-time work are – at the moment – dubious (Barcan, 2013, p. 8).

Widespread uncertainty about the viability of academic careers, and intensified and diversified demands on doctoral writing, have all contributed to additional burdens shouldered by many of today’s doctoral students. My argument is that many of the ingredients in the ‘potent recipe for disquiet’ (p. 240) that Barcan identified with regard to academic workers now apply to doctoral researchers as well.

**The affective-political imaginary of higher education research**

While I devote Chapter 3 to considering the habits of thought that tend to inform the ways higher education researchers constitute the relationship between the affective and political, I wish to briefly sketch these conventions now in order to better justify the queer turn this thesis takes later. As I argued in the section above, a large body of work has now emerged which positions higher education climates as uneasy (Smith, Rattray, Peseta & Loads, 2016) and ‘on edge’ (Kelly, 2015, p. 1158), set as they are within profound changes to the conditions and expectations of academic labour. But how do higher education researchers tend to understand the political scene of feeling bad in the contemporary university? Typically, higher education researchers narrate emotions as consequences of the political. Affect is often used to diagnose socio-political problems, such as the politics of neoliberalism, for example. By this approach researchers read the contemporary political moment by looking at the prevalence of feelings experienced by constituencies such as academics. As I outlined above the feelings...
that tend to be associated with the contemporary academic workplace include anxiety, fear, engulfment and depression (Gill, 2010; Burrows, 2012). The pervasiveness of these feelings tends to be taken as evidence that something within the political sphere has gone awry. While affect has increasingly been used as a diagnostic tool to read the political – it can also be understood as a political resource. Within higher education research there is an awareness that emotions can excite people to political activity. Typically, a common sense approach is taken to recognising which affective practices might open onto political practice and social change, and which feelings might forecast the opposite. Often ‘strong’ emotions, such as anger or hope are viewed as having significant political value. It is also often taken for granted that affects interpreted as consequences of the precarious present – anxiety, fear, engulfment or depression (Gill, 2010, Burrows, 2012) – also fail to transform it. ‘Weak’ affects are typically coded as holding the present conditions in place, causing higher education subjects to evacuate themselves from so-called genuine political practices (such as protest), which might animate transformation of the political sphere. As I will outline below, queer theory has offered a number of novel approaches that might be used to broaden the affective-political imaginary in higher education research.

Across this thesis I argue that the field of doctoral education studies would benefit from empirical research and new theoretical tools in order to open new conceptual angles into what is a complex and multifaceted picture of doctoral

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9 Less predictable examples of working with affect within HE, on the other hand, include Hey’s (2004) scrutiny of the perverse pleasures of intellectual labour, or Petersen’s (2012) work on the ‘monstrousness’ of love in the neoliberal university. While these two examples focus on the potential complicitities of so-called strong, positive feelings, what has thus far been absent from higher education research is the re-consideration of critically de-valued affective practices/subject positions.
experience, politics and feeling. Having now introduced the intersecting point of affect and politics, in the next section I will add another layer to this conceptual framework: practice. I will make the case for the use of Wetherell’s (2012) rubric of ‘affective practice’ in empirical studies of emotion.

**Affective-political practice: A conceptual framework**

The next question that arises in my discussion about the conceptual resources used in this thesis is how social researchers might go about working with affective phenomena, especially for those of us who work with empirical texts. In bringing together my response to this question I have been drawn to the work of the social-psychologist Margaret Wetherell and her book *Emotion and affect: A new social science understanding* (2012). For Wetherell, affect displays ‘strong pushes for pattern’ (2012, p. 13) and can be best understood as a ‘practice’. A focus on affective practice draws the researcher’s attention to processes of ‘developmental sedimentation, routines of emotional regulation, relational patterns and “settling” whereby multiple sources of activation and information about body states, situations, past experiences, linguistic forms, flowering thought...become woven together’ (Wetherell 2012, p. 12). Three lines of approach are at the core of Wetherell’s rubric of affective practice: flow, pattern and power.

According to Wetherell, we must understand the body as a dynamic ‘flow immersed in other flows’ (2012, p. 31). As such, the affective activity located in our body is constantly being constituted and reconstituted. Wetherell argues that the flow of affect may become organised, or ‘effloresce’, with varying durations. For example, we can understand ‘flow’ by noticing how one affect, such as a
panic, might emerge rapidly as we remember our looming supervision meeting. It may press upon our attention, only to peter out minutes later. Other affects such as anxiety about finding work following graduation might be experienced as enduring background feelings or ‘atmospheres’. Attending to the ‘flow’ of affect calls researchers to closely examine the specific durations of affective phenomena.

The second foundational concept of affective practice concerns the patterning of affect. Wetherell argues that affectivities are practices, which may be interwoven with somatic, neural, phenomenological, discursive, relational, cultural, economic, developmental, and historical patterns to form ‘ruts’ (Wetherell, 2012). These ruts cut into the ‘social psychological life’ of a community, becoming habit (Wetherell, 2012, p. 14). By taking affect as a practice, we can trace these patterns across a site or an institution, or widen our focus to examine the ‘affective citation’ (Wetherell, 2012, p. 23) that subjects might re-enact across a social category, or historical period. This opens up questions about the habitual reconstitution of certain kinds of emotional subjects, or affective subject positions over time. Attending to the patterning of affect allows us to think about whether there have been significant shifts in how doctoral education has been experienced over time, or whether habits of feeling can be traced across the current doctoral education experience.

The third foundational concept of Wetherell’s rubric is power. For Wetherell, ‘power works through affect and affect emerges in power’ (2012, p. 16). She calls on Ahmed’s (2004a, 2004b) notion of ‘affective economy’ to explore ‘the unevenness of affective practices’ and to ask how emotions are ‘clumped, who gets to do what when, and what relations does an affective practice make, enact,
disrupt and reinforce…’ (Wetherell, 2012, p. 17). Affective practices are important, because global political issues are often refracted through ‘domestic, ordinary and wearing affective routines’ (2012, p. 7). This prompts questions about the regulation of affect, its uneven distribution and value. For example, why is it that some sentiments tend to be more highly valued in public communication, whereas others are more commonly deemed to be irrelevant? (Staiger, Cvetkovich & Reynolds, 2010). Who can take up what affective subject position? And, how does affective value come to be assigned to some figures, and not others? In terms of doctoral education in NZ, we might think of the ways in which affect shapes the political field, particularly with regard to race. We can, for example, trace affective performances of indignation among tauiwi at the so-called ‘special treatment’ of Māori and Pasifika doctoral students with regard to equity-based scholarships and targeted funding. The affective framing of equity initiatives as tauiwi students ‘missing out’ can work to blanket other narratives. These alternative stories may include the possibility that universities and the government are prioritising funding to engage cultural minorities that have been traditionally underserved by higher education, and/or addressing their obligations to tangata whenua by acting in accordance with the principles of New Zealand’s founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi (1840).

A key word to note in the above discussion, and a concept taken up across this thesis, is the term ‘ordinary’ (see Chapter 2, in particular). For Wetherell, it is ‘ordinary demotic, affective action – which typically proceeds with little meta-commentary, self-awareness or reflexive fuss – which needs to be grasped’ (Wetherell 2012, p. 78). This has resonances with an archive of scholarship in

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10 A Māori term for people of non-Māori descent.
11 A Māori term for the indigenous people of Aotearoa, which literally means ‘people of the land’
cultural studies that I will introduce next, which has attended to ‘ordinary’ affects (Stewart 2007) and traumas (Cvetkovich 2003) or quotidian practices (Jagose 2010). While some scholars embrace the ‘affective turn’ because it offers a turn against discourse, in Wetherell’s rubric the key conceptual resources used in discourse analysis remain useful. Combining the tools of discourse analysis with a theorisation of affective practice enables researchers to look for affective positions and the stances that people use to describe events from. It asks us to look for the broader discourses and cultural subject positions that may be evident in the texts we analyse. And it asks us to think about the kinds of emotional ‘characters’ that are being formulated as narratives are being told (Wetherell, 2003, 2012).

After reading across interdisciplinary literature on affect, I found that some of the most innovative and politically interesting debates have emerged from queer cultural studies. In the section that follows, I introduce this work and make the case for the use of queer conceptual figurations of affect as key theoretical resources in this thesis.

**The case for queer(y)ing**

Queer theory is a mode of enquiry that came to use in the 1990s. It can be viewed amid a series of broader poststructuralist and postmodern turns in gender theory that began in the mid-1980s (Rasmussen & Gowlett, 2015). Queer theory tends to

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13 While the word ‘queering’ is most commonly used in sex, sexuality and gender research, the term I apply in this thesis is queer(y)ing. As Gowlett (2014) explains, this is a way of marking that queer concepts are being applied to research domains outside of sex, sexuality and gender.
be associated with thinkers such as Judith Butler (1990, 1993), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990), Teresa de Lauretis (1991), Lauren Berlant (2011a), Jack Halberstam (2005, 2011), and Annamarie Jagose (1996, 2010), among others. My study has emerged at a time where queer conceptual work has been expanding across education studies\textsuperscript{14}. This has included at least three special issues of academic journals, in the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* (2010), *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* (2014), and *Higher Education Research & Development* (2015). However, as Rasmussen & Allen (2014) observe, within education studies there remains an expectation that queer researchers should, to some extent at least, confine themselves to topics related to gender, sex and sexuality. In this thesis, I extend Gowlett and Rasmussen’s (2014) call for queer concepts to ‘travel in education research’ (p. 333) beyond these traditional associations. Rather than anchoring queer to ‘proper’ identitarian subjects, or domain objects, I want to test what queer concepts can do ‘to subvert, challenge and critique a host of taken for granted “stabilities”…’ (Browne & Nash, 2010, p. 7), in particular the ‘stabilities’ associated with the affective-politics of doctoral education.

In order to accomplish this goal I have taken inspiration from work on affect produced by scholars associated with queer theory\textsuperscript{15} (Berlant, 2011a; Brennan, 2004; Cvetkovich, 2002, 2012b; Love, 2007; Munt, 2007; Ngai, 2005; Probyn, 2005; Stockton, 2006), as well as feminism (Blackman, 2015; Taylor, 2013), critical race studies (Cho, 2008; Muñoz, 2006), and black and anti-racist feminisms (Ahmed,


\textsuperscript{15} Most of this work originates from the Anglophone queer debates of North America and the UK.
It is my view that queer cultural studies readings of emotion and affect can offer nuanced methodologies to interrogate the sometimes common sense understandings of politics and felt experience in the literature on academic labour cited previously. Such a positioning allows me to trouble higher education research on emotion and neoliberalism which has tended to pathologise feeling bad, and it allows me to question whether such readings might obstruct other modes of thinking about the potential routes that the affective-political might take.

Inspired by the critique of the normal (Cvetkovich, 2012b), many queer theorists have turned away from thinking with a historically positive spectrum of affects like pride (Halperin & Traub, 2009) and ‘It Gets Better’ optimism (Cvetkovich, 2012b). Instead, they have paid particular attention to interrogating so-called positive feelings (Ahmed, 2010; Berlant, 2011a; Halberstam, 2011) as well as repositioning ‘negative’ affects as potential sites for critical understanding (Halberstam, 2008; Jagose, 2010). This turn to de-pathologise and work with

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16 Queer politics mobilised under the concept of ‘pride’ has undergone sustained critique. Halberstam (2005) associates the pride parade, for example, with consumerism, ‘floats that advertise a new gay bar or a new gay church or a new gay hardware store’ (p. 223). Equally, in a 2010 Periscope article entitled ‘It gets worse...’ Halberstam critiques the ‘saccharine message’ of the “It gets Better” campaign, arguing that ‘only a very small and privileged population can say with any confidence: “It gets better!”.’ As Halberstam (2010) argues, videos created by ‘impossibly good looking and successful people smugly recounting the highlights of their fabulous lives is just PR for the status quo’ (para. 3).

17 We can see a number of examples of this movement within queer and feminist cultural criticism. For example, Halberstam (2011) calls for the need to ‘poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life’ (p. 3), and Kipnis (2003) has written a sustained polemic ‘against love’. Two of the most important contributions have come from Ahmed (2010) and Berlant (2011). Ahmed (2010) has critiqued the conventional ‘promise of happiness’, observing the way that feminists, queers and migrants are often positioned as troublemakers and ‘killjoys’ who disturb normative conditions for happiness. She also offers a sceptical take on the (heteronormative, racist, sexist) forms of happiness that have been promised. As I will illustrate in Chapter 6, Berlant (2011) has explored the cruelty of the affective structure of optimism.
negative emotions like shame (Halperin & Traub, 2009), failure (Halberstam, 2011) and depression (Cvetkovich, 2012b) may be connected to the prominent role of loss and trauma in queer histories (Cvetkovich, 2003; Love, 2007) as well as a critical response to ‘the turn that mainstream lesbian and gay politics has taken toward homonormativity and neoliberalisms’ (Cvetkovich, 2012b, p. 6).

An example of this work is Heather Love’s *Feeling Backwards* (2007). This book explores why queer theorists ought to consider the bad feelings of ‘queer’ historical figures not only as evidence of their backwardness, but to see how these histories of feeling may have enduring effects. Love problematises the common portrayal of ‘useless feelings’ such as envy, despair and anxiety as unsuited to political action. To the contrary, Love (2007) argues such feelings may not indicate a disinterest in action, but may instead express something about how and why action is blocked. They may even contribute to queer kinds of political activity that are not currently visible. Exploring the possibilities of often written-off affects is important because, as Love notes, ‘the small repertoire of feelings that count as political – hope, anger, solidarity – have done a lot. But…a lot is not nearly enough’ (2007, p. 27). Usefully, Love outlines how her argument for a queer politics that encompasses negative affect might work in practice. She describes a Chicago-based group called *Feel Tank* which has:

> attempted to mobilise negative feelings such as paranoia and despair in order to make social change; they have established public events such as a yearly depression march, where marchers wear bathrobes and slippers, pass out prescriptions for Prozac, and carry placards that say things like ‘Depressed? It might be political’ (Love, 2007, p. 26)

Another scholar associated with this line of thinking is Ann Cvetkovich (2003, 2012a, 2012b), who describes *Feel Tank* as one of the ‘cells’ of a broader scholarly
collaboration called ‘Public Feelings’ which began in 2001. Cvetkovich describes this as a group that is interested in exploring ‘everyday feelings as an entry point on to political life’ (2012a, p. 132). She goes on to explain that the Public Feelings project is interested in how ‘the systemic forces of capitalism, racism, and sexism make us feel, and it is curious to work with despair, burnout, hopelessness, and depression rather than dismissing these ostensibly negative affects as debilitating liabilities or shameful failures’ (Cvetkovich, 2012a, p. 132-133). Where a political analysis might ordinarily ‘advocate revolution and regime change over pills’ (Cvetkovich, 2012b, p. 2), within a queer approach to feeling there are ‘no magic bullet solutions, whether medical or political, just the slow steady work of resilient survival, utopian dreaming, and other affective tools for transformation’ (Cvetkovich, 2012b, p. 2).

The resources I have introduced thus far – higher education research on doctoral education, emotions and academic labour, and queer cultural studies research on affect – might seem like rather incongruous bodies of knowledge. Yet I am attracted to incongruity, and the sparks of intellectual friction that may be generated by bringing bodies of knowledge that tend to be unaccustomed to each other into contact. Because of their relative positionings, I have often found myself turning away from the ‘quarrels that seem so important to the discipline’ of doctoral education, in order to ‘engage the ideas that circulate widely in other communities’ (Halberstam, 2011, p. 24) – particularly queer cultural studies. Rather than mourning this lack of disciplinary coherence I choose to view interdisciplinarity as an energy and a strength. The key work that queer concepts help me to undertake in this thesis is the opening of ‘theoretical doors in higher education research’ (Renn, 2010, p. 137).
While the studies of academic labour I introduced earlier do offer valuable accounts of the intersection between politics and feeling, at this stage in the conversation I suggest we can see a broadly common sense understanding of the relationship between the emotional-political. That is, there tends to be a dichotomy of affective-politics established – with some emotions or actions taken as ‘positive’ and productive (e.g. hope), and others taken as ‘negative’ and ill-suited to agency (e.g. fear). The argument I am pursuing in this thesis is that affective performances do not unfold as straightforwardly as the existing higher education accounts might present them. In line with queer cultural studies approaches, I am attempting to re-position the affective-politics of doctoral education in more messy and multi-directional ways. In the section that follows I discuss the research questions that guide this study.

**The research problem and research questions**

The earlier sections of this chapter highlighted some of the gaps and limitations with regard to understanding the affective and political dimensions of doctoral education. While I identified that research on the affective-politics of academic labour is growing, I wish to extend these accounts by focusing on the felt experience of doctoral education, particularly in ways that question straightforward understandings of affective-politics. Thus I now offer the following research questions:

1) How can doctoral education be researched and represented as an affective-political practice?
2) What can queer concepts do when applied to the affective-political scene of doctoral education?¹⁸

At this point I offer some notes on the format of my thesis, which speaks to the way I pursue the interests described above. While I originally planned to present this thesis in the more conventional monograph style, over time it has morphed into a compilation thesis. This means that the thesis arrives as a collection of small studies which all address certain facets of the research questions. My decision to write slender essays that are more loosely held together by central research questions has allowed me to ‘chase small projects, micropolitics, hunches, whims, fancies’ (Halberstam, 2011, p. 21) in ways I have found lively and engaging as a writer. It has also been useful for answering my second thesis question in that by writing with a number of case studies I have been able to work with some of the ‘many different voices and sometimes overlapping, sometimes divergent perspectives that can loosely be called “queer theories”’ (Hall, 2003, p. 5), and to see what each of these perspectives can be made to do (Britzman, 1995b; Rasmussen & Allen, 2014). Ideally, my thesis might be imagined less as a set menu from soup to pudding, and more as a platter of queer offerings that react wildly on the palate.

As I stated above, in this thesis I have sought to examine the changing conditions of doctoral education, and the kinds of affective-practices that surround it. At this point I think it is valuable to address what I mean by ‘the doctorate’ as this

¹⁸ In forming this guiding question I have been influenced by the work of Britzman (1995b) and Rasmussen & Allen, (2014) who have also explored what queer concepts can do. I am also influenced by the way Sara Ahmed has written about emotion. Rather than asking what emotions are, Ahmed asks: ‘what do emotions do?’ (2004a, p. 4).
term has already appeared in this chapter and will do so throughout the rest of my thesis.

**The ‘doctorate’**

The doctorate is a complex and expanding series of awards. In the national context of this thesis, NZ, the most common form of doctorate is the PhD by supervised research. This model almost exclusively involves a supervised research project, with students working with one or two primary supervisors. However, in other contexts, such as the United States, the PhD more typically involves advanced level coursework and passing a comprehensive examination as well as defending a dissertation. In addition to the research doctorate (PhD), there is a number of professional doctorates in NZ as elsewhere, such as the Doctor of Education (EdD) or Doctor of Social Work (DSW). These professional doctorates are more oriented to integrating academic and professional knowledge, and often include a portion of taught courses. There are also new forms of doctorate, such as the practice-based doctorate (Aitchison, 2015). Such doctorates can include a creative practice component, for example a performance or an exhibition. Doctorates can also take up elements of the PhD by (or with) publication. This is a model that shares most of the characteristics of PhD, but tends to be examined based on a series of peer-reviewed papers that have been published, or written as publications, which are also contextualised by an introduction and conclusion demonstrating an original contribution to knowledge. Increasingly, there are also models of ‘joint’ PhD, where students may be supervised by academics at two institutions, and where the doctorate is jointly awarded. While my thesis explores issues that are relevant to the diverse
‘family’ of doctorates, the award sought by all of the students engaged in my empirical study is the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). Students within this study did undertake modes of study that were not the standard PhD by supervised research. However, because of the small number of students taking up such positions within the institution I have chosen not to specify what ‘alternative’ models of doctorate each individual is studying for (by publication, by creative practice, or a joint PhD) in order to protect their anonymity.

So far this introductory chapter has described the focus of my study, set up the issues of interest, undertaken core definitional work, and addressed the unusual shape of the thesis, and the logic that underlies this. In the next section I foreground the tension that arises in my usage of queer concepts. I conclude this chapter by offering an outline of the structure of this thesis.

Engaging the tension: Intellectual work and pragmatic politics

While my intention in this thesis is to explore what queer concepts can do (Britzman, 1995b; Rasmussen & Allen, 2014) when applied to the affective-political scene of doctoral education, these pages are also revealing of moments where I have not done queer in a wholly uniform manner. For a long time I considered my reticence to hold a consistent ‘queer’ line to be a serious problem in my thesis. I even contemplated excluding chapters that might be revealing of the wobbliness of my ‘queer’ conceptual work, particularly with regard to its political philosophy and associated tactics. Yet no matter how many times I tried to ensure ‘queer’ was surfaced in a consistent way, these differences remained across each of the earlier drafts I wrote. Eventually I realised that the appearance of inconsistent attachments, multiple voices and improper subjects is actually
rather consistent with my broader epistemology which understands selves to be multiple, and shifting. So rather than repression, I have decided that acknowledgement and exploration are more helpful places to begin with my multiple queer-researcher subjectivities. In so doing, I am connecting to a broader desire among qualitative researchers to practice ‘uncomfortable reflexivity’ (Pillow, 2003). Pillow (2003) argues that exploring the messy and uncomfortable aspects of research practice is valuable, and calls for researchers to share ‘examples that do not seek a comfortable, transcendent end-point but leave us in the uncomfortable realities of doing engaged qualitative research’ (p. 193). What follows next is an account of my own conceptual slipperiness; it is an account of moving between a queer intellectual self, and another, more radical activist-researcher self.

The fact that this tension arises in my research practice may be explained, in part, by my own pathway into the concept of ‘queer’, which occurred via youth work and community development practice in NZ. In these community settings queer is often used as a non-normative sexual identity as in ‘I am queer’, or as a composite term for LGBT+ populations, with formations such as the ‘queer community’. In these spaces queer can also be used to describe non-conforming gender expressions and sexual practices, irrespective of the identities professed by those involved in them. Used in this way, queer works to describe subjects. It becomes a method to identify “who we are”. My initial investments in queer hinged on this meaning. Indeed, my previous job titles have included queer youth group coordinator and queer support coordinator. In this second position I advocated for students who encountered difficulties at university, as well as working to increase the recognition and representation of sex, sexuality and gender minorities across the institution. Alongside this position I have participated in
national and international networks of activism and advocacy around sex, sexuality and gender, as well as intellectual and creative work that I have pursued with friends and colleagues. Much of this practice (some of which has taken place as I have written this thesis) has worked with queer in ways that Youdell (2009) might call ‘Left-liberal’ and ‘identity political’.

However, as I began this thesis I recognised that there was a tension between my lived form of use, and the spirit of queer theory that it builds from\textsuperscript{19}. Youdell (2010) outlines this difference by arguing that queer ‘has not been who we really are, because “who we really are” is rejected by the queer theory that insists instead on practices’ (p. 88). This theoretical form of use takes queer as a ‘political metaphor without a fixed referent’ (Eng, Halberstam, & Muñoz, 2005, p. 1), or a ‘political and existential stance, an ideological commitment’ (Ford, 2011, p. 123). As Britzman (1995b) argues, ‘the queer and the theory in Queer Theory signify actions, not actors’ (p. 153). Thus, theoretically speaking, queer is a verb, something one does to interrogate norms (Britzman, 1995b; Rasmussen & Allen, 2014). While Youdell (2009) argues that both forms of use tend to share a commitment to intervene in the normative privilege of certain social groups, the two different ways of using and understanding queer offer distinct conceptual possibilities and political tactics.

In foregrounding this tension between radical work and queer theory I am in the good company of other researchers who have shared their own ‘conundrums’ (Quinlivan, 2013), and ‘uncomfortable stories’ (Youdell, 2010). Deborah Youdell’s work has been especially useful in helping me to unpack my approach here.

\textsuperscript{19} A fuller account of my experience of queer-researcher identity reconfigurations is available in Burford (2014c, pp. 232-234).
Youdell (2009, 2010) advocates for engaging in an ongoing process of thinking about the effects of the political philosophies enacted in research, arguing that all have possibilities and limits. In order to describe the tension between different political uses of ‘queer’ she offers an analysis of the popular children’s book *And Tango Makes Three* (Richardson & Parnell, 2005). This is a story about two male chinstrap penguins – Roy and Silo – who form a relationship in a New York zoo\(^{20}\). After their zookeeper notices Roy and Silo are nesting and taking care of an egg-shaped rock, he decides to give them an abandoned egg to incubate. After some time the egg hatches, and the fluffy white chick is named Tango by her handlers because ‘it takes two to tango’. Throughout the book we are constantly reminded that Roy and Silo are normal, they want a family just like the mama and papa penguins in the penguin house, or the monkey moms and dads. As Youdell (2009) argues, this representation of two penguin daddies arguably legitimates heteronormative family relations, merely adding diversity to the arrangements without subjecting prevailing conventions to much close scrutiny. For example, the normative chain of nuclear family, monogamy, cohabitation and child rearing remains largely unchallenged\(^{21}\). However, alongside this critique of the ‘natural, abiding, self-knowing LGBT subjects that post-structural accounts have challenged and queer politics have troubled’ (2010, p. 69) Youdell (2009) also acknowledges the book has another kind of potential. Within heteronormative primary classroom contexts where same-sex relationships and parents have often been unseen, unintelligible and illegitimate, this

\(^{20}\) The book is a part of, and has itself prompted, a wider interest in the non-normative sexual behaviour of penguins. For further studies on the discourse of “gay penguins” see Talburt & Matus (2012) and Halberstam (2011).

\(^{21}\) While this plot twist did not make it into the children’s book, Talburt & Matus (2012) report on the complexities of the “real” story of Roy and Silo, noting that when “Scrappy” a new female penguin was introduced, Silo left Roy to embark on a new “relationship”.

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representation opens up possibilities for discussions about their visibility, intelligibility and legitimacy.

As Youdell (2009) argues, it is not that one reading of the book is necessarily more correct than the other, nor can they easily cancel each other out. Instead, she argues that it is more important to develop an awareness of what a pursuit of each of these political philosophies – queer destabilisation, or queer visibility and equitable access – might do, and to think about these effects in a tactical way. For example, diversity work arguably remains an important option in a researcher’s toolbox, especially when the potential alternative is erasure (Youdell, 2009). Within this thesis I have occasionally taken up these tactics as I have engaged with certain kinds of questions and data (this is perhaps most evident in Chapter 5, which explores the affective politics of fat doctoral embodiment). Youdell (2010) reflects on her own experience of working with queer theory, in a way that underlines the shifty place I also find myself in:

I re-encounter myself early in my academic career, convinced by queer theory and concerned to “get it right”; I encounter myself in the present, now an established academic, still committed to but more questioning of queer theory and struggling against the abiding struggle to “get it right” (p. 93).

Rather than being an either/or sort of thing, I am trying to re-position “troubling” queer practices and claims for the legitimacy of queer subjects as coexisting, ‘in contradictory relation to each other, sometimes, and sometimes not, proving to be productive’ (Quinlivan, 2013, p. S66). This tension, and my own ambivalence about “getting queer(y)ing right”, is held actively throughout this thesis.
**Thesis structure**

This thesis arrives as a series of small studies that I approached individually, and have subsequently compiled into this thesis. As I mentioned above, the direction of my interpretive work varies, and some chapters undertake different kinds of queer(y)ing work than others. Additionally, two chapters offer a particularly intimate look at the practice of doctoral writing (Chapters 3 and 4), whereas others focus more broadly on the doctoral experience (Chapters 2, 5 and 6). All of the chapters are, however, affiliated by a core interest in the scene of the doctoral education experience, and how it may be researched and represented as an affective-political practice. Some of the chapters have been previously published. This has two implications for the thesis. First, it has meant that each of the chapters is of varying lengths and styles. The most slender of the analytic chapters is under 4000 words, whereas the lengthiest is just shy of 12,000. Secondly, it means that there will be some repetition of material such as methods and contextual literature across the chapters.

The loose relationship between the chapters, and their varied political and intellectual investments has made arranging this thesis a particularly challenging endeavour. In an earlier draft I divided the chapters into thematic parts, which were introduced by a ‘link text’ that wove the disparate threads of the thesis together. However, toward the end of the writing process it became clear that my quest for cohesion was actually tying the thesis up in knots. It also failed to account for my own inconsistencies and multiple loyalties as a researcher, intellectual, activist, and member of academic community. As a result, I reconsidered the way these chapters had been ‘settled’, and decided to dis-order the thesis based upon the chronological time in which each chapter was written. I
chose the arbitrary route of chronological order as much for its awkwardness as its fluency. In arranging the chapters of my thesis by the chronological date with which I began working on them, I am seeking to unsettle any trace of a progressive narrative where I, the researcher, might be seen to move from the ‘naïve’ position of transgender and queer community worker to a more ‘enlightened’ position of queer theorist. As I see it, this structure seems to provide reasonable fidelity to the slipperiness of the intellectual/political place I am in. In order to let the individual chapters do their work, I have kept cross-referencing between chapters to a minimum, and the synthesising work of the thesis is accomplished in the final chapter rather than signposted throughout. Additionally, I have elected to insert pictures created during the writing retreat between the chapters\textsuperscript{22}. These pictures offer an alternative way of ‘linking’ the material of the thesis together, as well as an opportunity for the reader to dwell on any resonances they may have with these images.

This first chapter has introduced the higher education literature and conceptual frameworks that ground this study. The section which follows this chapter is called \textit{Interlude 1}. This short section orients the reader to the methodological approach of this study, as well as the methods that were used to generate and analyse data.

This is followed by Chapter 2, \textit{Using evocative methodologies to attend to doctoral education’s affective landscapes}. In this chapter I explore affect as both an object of inquiry, as well as a methodological orientation. I introduce a series of writing...\textsuperscript{22} These pictures were created during two activities at the writing retreat. The first activity invited participants to create an artwork to reflect on their first solo writing session. The second activity asked students to depict their ‘real’ doctoral writing life as well as an ‘ideal’ doctoral writing life (see Appendix G).
‘experiments’, including ethnographic fiction and poetry, which seek to test the possibilities of alternative writing methodologies to attend to and represent affect. The act of queering this chapter enacts is an inversion of the ‘normal’ generic practices of academic writing. It illustrates that there is nothing ‘natural’ about taken-for-granted approaches to academic representation; instead, these are identified as a set of performances that congeal to form what Paré (2002) calls a ‘façade of normalcy’ (p. 60).

Following Chapter 2 is Interlude 2. This offers a short literature review on debates about doctoral writing research. I have inserted this interlude before Chapters 3 and 4, which both take a particularly intimate look at doctoral writing as an affective-political practice.

The focus in Chapter 3, Queer(y)ing the affective-politics of Higher Education, is to explore one case study of the tight emotional management of writing. I draw on Jagose’s (2010) work on queer and complex agency to trouble and extend the possibilities of critical readings of the politics of affect. The chapter explores the case of a doctoral student who is almost unrecognisable as a political subject, and searches for the agency that may be discerned in her affective practice. Following Jagose (2010), I propose that weak and politically ambiguous affective practices may enact forms of ‘twisted’ agency.

Chapter 4, Not writing and giving zero f**ks about it, is concerned with queer accounts of failure. While doctoral self-help books often repeat advice to ‘write early and write often’ (Lee & Aitchison, 2009, p. 94), in managerial times this has become a mantra increasingly surveilled by the institution. Drawing on Halberstam’s work in the ‘The Queer Art of Failure’ (2011), I examine how one
participant in the provisional year of their doctorate negotiates their implication in social discourses of guilt about not writing. Rather than taking this as an indicator of their lack of ‘success’, this student sought to practise failure, in pursuit of a richer conception of what doctoral success might be within, and beyond, the neoliberal university.

Chapter 5 Dear obese PhD applicants, remains in more of an activist space. In the chapter I discuss body size, a social variable laden with immense burdens of signification within neoliberal education contexts. I argue that in an era of intensification, where the doctoral body is expected to be move faster and be more productive, some bodies become seen as ‘unfit’ to study. The chapter illustrates a prominent cultural case where a U.S professor publicly issued a ‘fat-shaming’ tweet in 2013. I draw upon queer cultural studies of affect and critical fat studies scholarship in order to understand the resistance enacted on a photo-blog called Fuck Yeah! Fat PhDs that arose in response. I argue that the fat-shaming tweet created the conditions for a particular kind of community that arose in response to discourses of social abjection. The queer work of this chapter is to interrogate the ‘thinness norm’ (Eller, 2014) that arises in educational contexts, as well as to explore the productive potential of negative affects. The chapter argues that publics formed out of shame came together in order to challenge discourses of social abjection as well as to engender and circulate other ways of feeling about being fat and doctoral.

Chapter 6, The trouble with doctoral aspiration now, draws on verbal and visual data from across the study to explore students’ powerful affective investments of hope in the doctorate. I draw on Berlant’s (2011a) work on ‘cruel optimism’ to question how certain fantasies can bind subjects to precarious modes of
existence. Here, affective relations of cruel optimism for an ‘academic good life’ become a ‘monster astray in the flesh’ of doctoral students (Petersen, 2012). I explore whether the practice of writing may be seen as an ‘adjustment’ that keeps students tethered to the organising fantasy of an academic life beyond the PhD, at the same time as the object appears to crumble around many of them.

Chapter 7 is the summary chapter of this thesis. It begins by highlighting the contributions of my study to various research communities. I consider some limitations of the study, as well as some questions that remain to be asked or answered.

All of the chapters in this thesis have things to say about the affective-politics of doctoral education. They signal a commitment to a different style of doctoral education research, one which sees the PhD as a messy, complex, politically and emotionally-engaged practice. The significance of this understanding is that we need to supplement existing research that seeks to ‘improve’ the performance of doctoral students with studies concerned with what their felt experience can teach us about the possibilities and constraints for action in the present. While the queer theoretical approach I have often taken in this thesis does not offer a specific answer to the questions of what to do about doctoral education now, its value lies in its ability to discern alternative routes for being with (and against) the present conditions of doctoral education. I hope that others – doctoral supervisors and students – will find something that speaks to them in the chapters that follow, whether this be provocation, new insights, or the ordinary comfort of knowing they are not alone in experiencing the doctorate as a difficult, politically complicated and emotionally challenging endeavour.
FIGURE 1. Joel’s ‘Ideal of society of a writer’
Interlude I

Methodological orientation

While the methods I have used in the thesis are elaborated within the individual chapters that follow, here I offer a preview of the broader shape of the research methodology in order to provide the reader with a sense of how the overall project comes together. I begin by discussing the research methodology, followed by an account of the methods used to generate and analyse data.

Research methodology

The term methodology refers to the ‘theoretical assumptions and principles that underpin a particular research approach. It guides how a researcher frames the research question and decides on what process and methods to use’ (Giddings & Grant, 2006, p. 5). In bringing together this thesis, I view myself as developing from existing work on queer methodologies (Browne & Nash, 2010; Haritaworn, 2008; Holliday, 2004; Treharne & Brickell, 2011), particularly within education studies (Allen, 2011; Britzman, 1995b; Bryson & de Castell, 1993; Gowlett, 2014, 2015; Gowlett & Rasmussen, 2014; Rasmussen, 2016; Rodriguez & Pinar, 2007; Sheldon, 2010). While, as Haritaworn (2008) notes, queer has ‘often been interpreted as inimical to empirical investigation’ given the tendency for work to emerge in ‘philosophy and the humanities rather than sociology and the social sciences’ (para. 2.1), in this thesis I aim to integrate queer theory’s critical analysis of normativities with qualitative (see also, Dilley, 1999), as well as cultural inquiry.
Building upon feminist and postmodern critiques, queer researchers have interrogated positivist approaches to research that draw upon notions of objectivity, neutrality and binary systems. Over the course of this thesis I have tried to unlearn my instinct to search for a truth that is real and ‘already out there’ (Britzman, 1995a, p. 237). Instead of a universal truth about the social world, queer theorists tend to see multiple claims to truth, and view knowledge as historically situated. Rather than a claim on the ‘reality’ of doctoral education, my objective in this thesis has been to think about how the felt experience of the doctorate is constituted in the cultural, autoethnographic and empirical texts subject to analysis. While the participants in my study were living, breathing, feeling people, in this thesis I make no claim to ‘represent their actuality’ (Britzman, 1995a, p. 232). Instead, I focus on what I can read in their texts about the cultural place of doctoral education and its felt experience. This is a mode of working that understands ‘subjects may well be the tellers of experience; but every telling is constrained, partial and determined by the discourses and histories that prefigure, even as they might promise, representation’ (Britzman, 1995a, p. 232). I have not sought to build upon the continuity of the ‘real’ identities of individuals. Although data taken from the same participant may occur, in each chapter participants are given a different pseudonym. For ethical reasons23, I undertake some intentional blurring of the identities of participants to enhance their anonymity, particularly in order to separate sensitive diary-interview data from the ‘public’ accounts generated among other participants during the study.

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23 This research project was approved by the Auckland University Human Ethics Committee Ref: 8675 (see Appendix E).
In order to articulate the values that shape this thesis, I have returned to the earlier work of queer researchers (Britzman, 1995b), as well as more recent contributions (Jagose, 2010) for guidance. In her 1995b essay ‘Is there a queer pedagogy? Or, stop reading straight’; Deborah Britzman argues that queer theory offers ‘methods of critique to mark the repetitions of normalcy as a structure... [it] insists on posing the production of normalization as a problem of culture and of thought’ (Britzman, 1995b, p. 153-154, my emphasis). While she refuses to pin down a ‘pronouncement of content’, Britzman (1995b) does articulate some particular techniques that tend to be identified with queer theory as a method. There are two components of Britzman’s (1995b) ‘queer methodology’ that I find particularly helpful, the first being ‘the study of limits’, and the second ‘the study of reading practices’ (p. 155). For Britzman (1995b), the study of limits is ‘a problem of where thought stops, a problem of thinkability. It begins with the question, “what makes something thinkable?” as opposed to explaining how someone thinks.’ (p. 156). This mode of research seeks to scrutinise unmarked and seemingly neutral criteria that operate to ‘dismiss as irrelevant or valorize as relevant a particular mode of thought, field of study, or insistence upon the real’ (Britzman, 1995b, p. 156). In order to be thinkable and recognisable, Britzman (1995b) argues, social structures (including educational systems, or ‘politics’) require the presence of the ‘dismissed, the unworthy, the irrelevant’ (p. 156). She offers an example of ‘the individual who lacks self-esteem in order for the category of self-esteem to be installed into the body’ (p. 156). A queer methodology, then, is used to interrogate ‘the intelligibility that produces the normal as the proper subject’ (Britzman, 1995b, p. 157).

Britzman’s (1995b) thoughts on ‘the study of limits’ forming part of a queer methodology are echoed in recent work by Annamarie Jagose (2010). In her
discussion on the cultural phenomenon of the fake orgasm, Jagose (2010) describes her project as ‘pursuing beyond the bounds of common sense’ in order to ‘estrange us productively from our more familiar knowledges’ (p. 518). The more familiar knowledges Jagose is referring to in her essay are feminist and political Left accounts that tend to recognise fake orgasm as a practice that does not promise much political potential. However, as Jagose (2010) argues, it is the ‘implausibility of contemplating fake orgasm as signifying anything other than sexual subjection, the massive and unmitigated unlikeliness of reading fake orgasm as a counterdisciplinary tactic, that most recommends its consideration’ (p. 529). As Jagose (2010) notes, templates of political recognisability tend to be connected to ideas about ‘productive action’ – moving things along and making stuff happen (p. 532). In arguing for the ‘potential of the unintelligible, the unproductive and the wasteful’ (p. 533), Jagose (2010) puts forward a different understanding of political subjectivity – one that does not promise ‘much in the way of transformed lifescapes’ (p. 532). The ‘study of limits’, as articulated by both Britzman (1995b) and Jagose (2010) is a part of the queer work of this thesis. Like Jagose (2010), I am interested in queer(y)ing the limits of political recognisability. To be specific, I am interested in queer(y)ing the grounds for politicality that feeling ‘bad’ might open (see Chapters 3 and 4), as well as the constraining possibilities of positive feelings, such as optimism (see Chapter 6).

‘The study of reading practices’ is another queer method identified by Britzman (1995b). She argues that there are ‘no innocent, normal or unmediated readings and that the representations drawn upon to maintain a narrative or a self as normal, as deviant, as thinkable, are social effects of how discourses of normalization are lived and refused’ (p. 164). She goes on to argue that ‘the point is that part of what is at stake when discourses of difference, choice, and
visibility are at stake is the capacity of the educational apparatus and its pedagogies to exceed their own readings’ (p. 164). This is further elaborated by Holliday (2004), who argues that ‘reading is made by readers, frequently against authorial intention…’ (p. 1601). I view my methodological approach as queer in so far as it seeks to denaturalise and deconstruct norms, that is to ‘stop reading straight’ (p. 164).

In rehearsing these sections of the work of Britzman (1995b) and Jagose (2010), my aim has been to demonstrate the assumptions and principles that underpin queer research methodologies. Queer theory is useful for higher education researchers, because it encourages more debate about what comes to be constructed as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ in university contexts. In this thesis a queer methodology means looking beyond standard critical discourse on affect to ask what kinds of norms have arisen, and what modes of understanding particular affective practices have become dominant. It means asking how some ways of understanding affective-politics become normalised and feel natural.

**Methods used to gather/produce data**

The values of a queer methodology have also influenced the research methods I chose to use. I have taken up Halberstam’s (1998) vision of queer as a ‘scavenger methodology’ that mixes and matches methods, and resists calls to disciplinary coherence. Across this thesis (as I will explain in further detail below), I have drawn on a range of methods, including visual analysis of public images and participant-elicited drawings, and close readings of case-study texts taken from transcripts, as well as my own autoethnographic writing practice.
Data set one

The first set of data is a series of texts created as a product of the author’s autoethnographic reflection and experimentation with ‘evocative genres’ for representing doctoral education and affect. These data – which include an ethnographic fiction, and three poems – are explored in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Data set two

Another data set is a series of texts taken from the online world of doctoral students – tweets, blog posts and a collection of images from a photo-blog called “Fuck Yeah! Fat PhDs” that was created in mid-2013. These data are explained in further detail in Chapter 5.

Data set three

The other large series of texts (explored in Chapters, 3, 4, and 6) were generated out of empirical research between February and June, 2013, with ten doctoral students in the faculties of Arts and Education (further biographical details are given in the table below). While there were ten students who participated in the study, one participant was unavailable each time of collection, meaning there are nine sets of the following:

(1) Writing diaries, where students were asked to record events about their felt experience of doctoral education, and detail the everyday habits of their
writing practice. These diaries ranged in length and detail from participant to participant: the shortest diary was one small paragraph, and the longest was 14 entries and over 7500 words (see Appendix D);

(2) The transcripts of one interview with each student, which ranged in length from 45 minutes to over two hours. These occurred after the diary was submitted in order to allow points of interest raised within the diary to be explored (see Appendix C);

(3) Audio-recorded sessions at a 3-day residential writing retreat, supplemented by my own field journal (further details about the retreat are given in a table in Appendix G); and

(4) Drawings, paintings and collages that were created during art-making sessions at the 3-day residential writing retreat.

In order to recruit participants I created an advertisement (see Appendix A) that invited doctoral students in the faculties of Arts and Education at a NZ university to take part in this study. I decided to limit the empirical study to students in the ‘writing disciplines’ (arts, humanities and the ‘soft’ social sciences) as these students study within a particular kind of research ‘culture’. Where doctoral students in the physical sciences might be part of a larger funded study, and work in community with their supervisors or other lab-partners, students in the social sciences tend to work solo, with less frequent supervisory contact (J. White, 2013). More specifically, I decided to work with students in the arts, humanities and social sciences because they share a profile as writers within disciplines that are increasingly viewed as ‘superfluities or luxuries’ (Barcan,
2013, p. 22). Studies have also found that students in arts and social sciences have comparatively high attrition rates (Cohen, 2006) and a lower likelihood of achieving writing outcomes such as successful refereed publications (Kamler & Thomson, 2008).

The advertisement I created to recruit participants briefly described the research, expectations of participation, and my contact details (see Appendix A). I secured permission from administrators at both faculties to have the emails sent through doctoral mailing lists. As my research design called for a sustained engagement with participants over a period of five months, I elected to recruit a maximum of ten students only. One week after the email had been sent out, I had received over 20 responses from eligible doctoral students. My concern in managing recruitment was to maximise variation among participants without attempting to attain a statistically representative sample. I wanted to select a cross-section of differences, including gender, age, ethnicity, enrolment and residency status.

Subsequently, I asked prospective participants to send a short biographical statement, which introduced them, their research topic, and something about their approach to writing. The profile of early responders to my advertisement was skewed toward Pākehā women in their 20s and 30s. At the early stages of recruitment there were few men, Māori, Pasifika and Asian students who applied; additionally there was a high proportion of students who described negative emotions with regard to their doctoral writing experience. As a result of the limited diversity of the initial sample group, approximately one month later I sent out a second, differently worded email with the advertisement attached.

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24 The term Pākehā is a Māori language description, commonly used to describe New Zealanders of European descent.
(Appendix A). This attracted several more participants to apply. In sending out this second advertisement, my hope was to recruit students who described a range of feelings about writing, as well as offering another opportunity to recruit students other than women, and from cultural groups other than Pākehā. Ultimately, the group of students recruited to the study was whiter and younger than I anticipated. While Māori participants applied to join the study, unfortunately these students were unavailable during the time booked for the writing retreat.

**TABLE I: Participant characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Male, Pākehā, full-time, domestic student, 40s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Female, Pākehā, part-time, domestic student, 50s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Female, British, full-time, international student, 30s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Female, German, full-time, international student, 30s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Male, German, full-time, international student, 30s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Female, NZ European, full-time, domestic student, 20s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Male, Asian, full-time, international student, 30s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Female, Pākehā, full-time, domestic student, 30s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Not-specified, Pākehā, full time, domestic student, 30s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, there were four men and five women doctoral students, with one student who did not specify a gender. Five of the students identified as Pākehā or NZ European, and four of the students described themselves as international
students, with one not specifying. In terms of age, six of the participants were in their 30s, with one participant each in their 20s, 40s, and 50s. Again, one participant did not specify an age. Across the group, 8 were full-time students at the time of the interviews and retreat, one was part-time and one did not specify.

The study began with diary-interview method (Spowart & Nairn, 2014). Solicited diaries are helpful research methods because they allow data to be collected over a long duration, which can enable researchers to trace patterns across the text. Diaries also enable data to be collected close to the time of an event, and they are written at a time and place that is convenient, without the presence of the researcher (Spowart & Nairn, 2014). Follow-up interviews are then used to reflect back on earlier accounts within the diary, and to generate additional insights. According to Spowart and Nairn (2014), diary-interview method is especially valuable for generating ‘detailed accounts of personal experiences and meanings’ (p. 328) and in particular, rich ‘emotional data’ (p. 328). As I was interested in exploring the doctoral students’ understandings of the felt experience of doctoral education, this method seemed to be particularly appropriate for this study.

There were three components to the diary-interview method. The first began with an orientation interview, which was conducted face-to-face or over video call, where I introduced myself and the thesis project, collected biographical information and explained the diary. This was followed by a period of mostly independent diary writing. I say mostly because some participants did send through drafts, and two participants requested that I send them some prompts in order to motivate them to write. Participants were asked to write at least weekly, and were directed to share their thoughts and feelings on their current writing work as a part of their PhD (see Appendix D). In our initial interviews I indicated
to participants that the mode of representation in their ‘diary’ was up to them, and that they could write, draw, paint, take photographs, or record themselves in dance or other forms of movement. Some participants did respond to this invitation, amassing photographs, scraps of paper, and examples of draft writing. Most participants typed their diaries and emailed them to me later.

After participants returned their diaries, I scheduled semi-structured interviews. During June 2013 I conducted 9 interviews with participants, in meeting rooms, a nearby café and a participant’s apartment, depending on the preference of the interviewee. Each interview varied in length, some lasting under one hour, others over two. Some interviews I transcribed myself, others were transcribed by a professional transcriber who signed a confidentiality agreement. The interviews were flexible, and often began with a simple question, ‘How has your writing been going?’ Depending on the engagement, sometimes this was enough to begin a conversation that had a narrative flow. Other times I relied more on prepared questions (see Appendix C). In all interviews I asked participants about how they experienced the writing retreat, and moments that stood out for them. I also used the interview to return to moments I was interested in during the writing retreat, or details I noticed as I was reading through their writing diaries that appeared to relate to my research focus on doctoral education, politics and affect. For example, I asked one student to expand upon a diary entry where she repeatedly described herself as ‘managing’ her emotions around writing, or another student to expand on the way they used prayer as a part of their doctoral practice.

The second layer of my empirical research was to undertake a 3-day, 2-night residential writing retreat in a rural location near Auckland, with transportation
and accommodation provided by the researcher. While there are a number of published studies about the practice of using retreats as writing interventions for academics or postgraduate students (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009; Grant, 2006; Grant & Knowles, 2000; Moore, 2003; Murray & Newton, 2009; Singh, 2012), to date I have been unable to find any published studies which have used residential retreats as a part of the design for a broader higher education research project. In this case, the residential retreat was used as a container to extend opportunities for contact with participants. Compared to other methods (such as focus group interviews) holding a writing retreat offered an opportunity for me to participate in and observe doctoral socialisation over a longer period of time. The intent of this method was aligned with my goal of inquiring into the identity and emotion work of doctoral students, which I believe required deep, sustained and thoughtful engagement. The retreat programme itself was inspired by Grant’s ‘Women Writing Away’ model (2008) and adapted for this study with a series of arts-based research activities, group and pair discussions, as well as personal writing time. The group sessions centred on exploring the writing practices of the nine students who participated in the retreat, and their feelings about doing a PhD. The ‘data’ produced at the retreat were 18 visual artefacts created by participants (including collages, paintings, and drawings), photographs taken during a sculpture exercise, and several hours of recorded conversations among participants during group sessions (see Appendix G). While I have read through and engaged with all of these texts, the style of close queer analysis employed in this thesis has meant that only three of the artworks are subjected to final analysis in the thesis.

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25 Accommodation, food, materials and transportation costs for participants at the retreat were covered by my doctoral research budget.
My arts-inclusive methodology forms a part of an increasing turn toward visual methods in educational research (Allen, 2009; Metcalfe, 2012, 2015, 2016). I recognise that there is already a wealth of sources of visual knowledge about the doctorate, including comic websites such as *Piled Higher and Deeper* ([http://phdcomics.com/comics.php](http://phdcomics.com/comics.php)), and tumblrs such as *PhD Stress* ([http://phdstress.com/](http://phdstress.com/)) or *Fuck Yeah! Fat PhDs* (Burford, 2015a), as well as a number of Internet memes about postgraduate education that circulate on social media (Badenhorst & Guerin, 2016). However, as Metcalfe (2012) argues, higher education researchers themselves have seldom explored the possibilities of working with the visual. A goal of my study has been to understand the state of the doctoral present, and how doctoral students describe the ‘landscape of everyday feelings’ (Cvetkovich, 2012b, 122) of being a doctoral student, now. I thought that asking students to create artworks might help us to make these scenes more tangible, and we might be able to read them in order to apprehend something about the ‘structure of feeling’ (Williams, 1977; Blackman, 2009) of the doctoral present. I selected drawings, paintings and collage, because they, ‘like other forms of visual imagery, are about how people see the world in both its simplicities and its complexities’ (Guillemin, 2012, p. 275).

**‘Methods’ of interpreting the data**

Finally, I’d like to comment on the processes I undertook to interpret data throughout this thesis. In two of the chapters, Chapters 2 and 5, I discuss my practice of interpreting data in some detail. In Chapter 2, I explain the rationale behind my analytic approach to evocative autoethnographic writing, and in Chapter 5 I describe my use of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in order to interpret images of fat doctoral students on an online photo blog. In this short
section I would like to describe the methods I used to interpret interview transcripts, diaries and visual texts associated with the empirical components of this study (Chapters 3, 4 and 6).

I am reluctant to talk about this process as a ‘method’, in case such a description evokes something more stable and predictable than was the reality in this case. My typical analytic procedure was to read over the empirical texts multiple times, at the same time as reading work from queer cultural studies, doctoral education and academic labour. And then something would happen; I would notice a description or a metaphor that illuminated an aspect of the empirical material in an interesting way, and I would pursue that line of thought, returning to re-read the text carefully (and cross check audio files) in light of this new connection. Rather than a ‘mechanical search for meanings, patterns, codes or themes’ (Maclure, 2013, p. 228), I was open to being drawn to fragments of data that exerted some kind of pull on me. This was a way of working informed by Maclure’s (2013) writing on the ‘wonder of data’. Maclure (2013) describes wonder as a process which researchers may feel ‘in the gut, or the quickening heartbeat’ (p. 229). This form of working views researchers and ‘data’ as in an entangled relationship, as Maclure suggests:

> It is not clear where it originates and to whom it belongs...When I feel wonder, I have chosen something that has chosen me, and it is that mutual “affection” that constitutes “us” as, respectively, data and researcher (2013, p. 229)

After I selected parts of the data I wanted to work with (or the data ‘announced itself’ to me), my mode of analysis was a form of close textual reading, often using Wetherell’s (2012) rubric of flow, pattern and power as a beginning point. I
would examine the text for varying durations of affect that may be visible, as well as repetitions of affective subject positions. In the end, I identified two case studies that related to queer ideas around affective agency (Chapter 3) and failure (Chapter 4). I also read through the transcripts and visual data in order to locate material relating to doctoral aspiration for Chapter 6.

**Conclusion**

Having now described my methodological orientation, and the methods of data generation and analysis I employed in this study, in the next analytic chapter I examine the possibilities that evocative writing methodologies may offer to research and represent the affective-political context of doctoral education.
FIGURE 2. David’s picture after writing
CHAPTER 2

MODES OF WRITING TO ATTEND TO DOCTORAL EDUCATION’S AFFECTIVE LANDSCAPES

This chapter draws together a collection of ‘writing experiments’ I have conducted throughout my doctoral candidature. While making use of two different genres (ethnographic fiction and research poetry), these experiments are united in the attention they bring to the ‘affective landscapes’ (Nöbauer, 2012) of doctoral education’s political present. The chapter is in three parts. In response to earlier arguments about an absence of studies examining the affective-political dimensions of doctoral education, this chapter begins by considering what modes of writing might be well suited to representing such affective phenomena. I contend that the research practice of composing ‘evocative writing’ (Richardson, 1994b) invites a different mode of attention on the part of the researcher, a way of being that is perhaps slower, and more attentive to the ‘remarkable unremarkable’ features of daily life (Kelly, 2015, p. 1153). It also produces representations that are qualitatively different to the conventional research paper, representations that intend to evoke meaning, and affect the reader. In the second part of the chapter, I introduce the two methodologies I have drawn on – ethnographic fiction and poetry – and locate them within existing higher education research. Following this, I present the writing experiments I produced, and reflect on them in turn. My purpose here is to proliferate evocative accounts of doctoral education and to explore what they might offer to the wider field. The final section of the chapter returns to the theoretical thread of this thesis, to ask: in what ways might evocative writing methodologies be understood as ‘queer’? It offers a view of experimental forms
as ‘an opening, a clearing in the woods of research regularities’ (Glesne, 1997, p. 218), that is, forms of writing that can provide alternatives to standard research writing. However, the chapter also cautions that there is nothing inevitably ‘queer’ about such research practices.

**Do we need alternative writing methodologies to attend to doctoral affect?**

The origins of this chapter lie in a sense of curiosity about how higher education researchers might accomplish the task of registering and representing doctoral affect. My concern to consider alternative ways of ‘doing’ writing has arisen in response to some doubt as to whether conventional modes of representing higher education research have adequately evoked its affective dimensions. As I have read across higher education research for this thesis, I have come to the view that while existing modes have a lot to offer, they also have some limits. In particular, conventional modes of representation often seem to struggle to grasp ‘the intensity and texture that makes [affects] habitable and animate’ (Stewart, 2007, p. 4). To a certain extent this is understandable, as attending to affective phenomena is a complex and confounding undertaking. As Wetherell (2012) argues, a turn to affect necessarily calls researchers to ‘a focus on embodiment, to attempts to understand how people are moved, and what attracts them, to an emphasis on repetitions, pains and pleasures, feelings and memories’ (p. 2). Despite the difficulty, that we do find ways to represent affective phenomena is vital because it is through ‘ordinary affect that people engage with the momentous and the global political’ (Wetherell, 2012, p. 7).
This chapter, then, contributes to an expansion of the methods available for higher education researchers to represent emotion and affect. In addition to my curiosity and doubt, I have also been inspired by some recent higher education research. Indeed, I have detected an increasingly flirtatious relationship developing between researchers of academic emotion and alternative genres for ‘doing’ academic representation. Higher education researchers have begun infusing their work with personal narratives (Saltmarsh & Randell-Moon, 2014), autoethnographic writing (Pelias, 2004), ethnographic fiction (Sparkes, 2007) and poetry (Elizabeth & Grant, 2013; Jones, 2010). In addition, those from outside the discipline have contributed higher education-focussed vignettes (Gill, 2010) and memoir (Cvetkovich, 2012b).

Taking a closer look at research on postgraduate education, we see Carr and colleagues (2013) echo the call to grasp new ways of ‘doing’ representation. They argue that researchers need to find ways to constitute composition as a ‘full-bodied, affective, and interactive experience’ (‘In the raw’, para. 6) that ‘presses on the full range of the emotional spectrum’ (‘In the raw,’ para. 6). According to Carr and colleagues (2013), this requires new ways of representing, but also different modes of paying attention to affective phenomena:

the most meaningful moments of insights into literacies are felt, spontaneous, embodied and immediate: the grip of panick [sic] we face going into finals week, the harried calculations we run while surveying the week’s reading load, the vacuuming between drafts, the epiphany that comes in the shower… (‘In the raw’, para. 3)

In representing their accounts, the authors turn to the ‘raw’, creating a collective digital archive which comprises audio, visual and text files of graduate students reflecting on their composition experiences. Carr and colleagues explain that
graduate literacies accumulate in unexpected and improvised ways, and it is therefore valuable to find ways of ‘doing’ representation in the same spirit. It is my goal in this thesis to extend Carr and colleagues’ account (2013), to argue that evocative writing methodologies can enable a more nuanced engagement with what it feels like to be a doctoral student in the neoliberal university.

This chapter extends these movements in its exploration of approaches that have been variously described as experimental forms (Glesne, 1997), arts-based inquiry (Finley, 2003), creative analytic practice (Berbary, 2011) performative writing as scholarship (Pelias, 2005) or evocative writing methodologies (Richardson, 1994b; Rolling, 2008 p. 849). In this chapter I experiment with two literary forms in particular: ethnographic fiction (Gray, 2004; Petersen, 2007; Rinehart, 1998; Sparkes, 1997, 2002; Tierney, 1993); and research poetry (Curtis & Meager, 2013; Elizabeth & Grant, 2013; Fitzpatrick, 2012; Quinlan, 2013). My purpose in taking up these methodologies is ‘sociological as opposed to literary’ (Jones, 2011, p. 631). That is, I wish to explore the potential these methods have to register and represent the affective practices that cluster around doctoral education. Rather than an exercise in coming to ‘know’ doctoral affect in a traditional sense, I frame these experiments as attempts to patch together a ‘scene’ which might evoke it. Like Maréchal and Linstead (2010), I am not arguing that evocative writing methodologies offer a ‘penetrating vision of ‘enlightenment’ that illuminates a deeper and more inward ‘essence’ (p. 69). Rather I suggest that by ‘widening the scope of representational forms in play… it may be possible to shine a light on a different part of representational topography, from a different angle’ (Maréchal & Linstead, 2010, p. 69), or what the anonymous reviewer in Sparkes’ (2007) paper calls ‘increasing the circumference of the visible’ (p. 541). Later in this chapter, I offer an ethnographic
fiction and a series of poems that I have written in order to experiment with alternative writing methods, and their capacities to attend to doctoral affect. Before I introduce each piece and the context for writing it, I briefly sketch the genres they take up, and explain how these modes of writing might offer new resources for higher education researchers interested in affect and political change.

**Ethnographic fiction**

Ethnographic fiction has an established history in anthropological research (Behar, 2001; Gatewood, 1984; Schmidt, 1981), yet has only made occasional appearances in education studies (Gerla, 1995; Sparkes, 1997). Ethnographic fiction writers use stories in order to encourage their readers ‘to become immersed into the immediacy and vividness of others’ life situations, and to inhabit viscerally their world’ (Gray, 2004, p. 44-45). The method draws on many of the techniques used in creative fiction, such as using scenes to show rather than tell; building interest through character development; and using plot to generate dramatic tension (Sparkes, 2002). In contrast to creative fiction, however, ethnographic fiction requires proximity; the researcher needs to have ‘been there’ (Sparkes, 2002, p. 2) gathering ‘data’ from the research field. As a form of research, ethnographic fiction does not offer ‘reliability’ in the traditional social science sense; instead, the goal is ‘verisimilitude’ (Sparkes, 1997, p. 36). Ellis (1995) elaborates:

In evocative storytelling, the story’s ‘validity’ can be judged by whether it evokes in you, the reader, a feeling that the experience described is authentic, that it is believable and possible; the story’s generalizability can
Looking at higher education research in particular, there are a number of ethnographic fictions that have made important contributions to our collective understanding of university work and life. An excellent example is William Tierney’s (1993) fiction entitled *The Cedar Closet*. This story is told from the perspectives of six different characters involved in making a decision as to whether sexual orientation ought to be added to a university non-discrimination policy. Tierney (1993) described the impetus behind his project as emerging from ‘disenchantment with traditional portrayals of organizational life’:

for many of us who work in education, often these [traditional] portrayals do not ring true. To mask our ‘subjects,’ we strip the data of anything that might be personally revealing. We withhold data we did not specifically hear or see even though we often know such data are correct. (p. 312).

Tierney expressed his hope that ethnographic fiction ‘might provoke reflection about alternative ways to portray and to improve the worlds in which we live’ (1993, p. 312). This is a sentiment echoed in Margaret Vickers’ (2014) creative nonfiction on another difficult-to-represent aspect of university life in *Workplace bullying as workplace corruption*. In explaining her choice of genre, Vickers observed, ‘It is intended that engaging readers’ emotions might enable vicarious experiencing of reported events – to feel them, and their outcomes – with a view to enhanced understanding’ (2014, p. 961). Perhaps the best example of ethnographic fiction in higher education studies research is Andrew Sparkes’ (2007) piece *Embodiment, academics and the audit culture: A story seeking consideration*. The story foregrounds the embodied struggles of academic work amidst audit culture. It follows one senior scholar, Jim, whose life begins to
unravel as he realises his ‘escape’ into the ivory tower in the role of ‘radical academic’ may have also become something of a trap. The reader bears witness as Jim lurches from a fraught Research Output Meeting with the Vice Chancellor, to catching up with a tearful colleague who has just been restructured out of his position. Eventually, we witness Jim himself suffer a mental breakdown. Sparkes’ (2007) moving account of the stresses of contemporary academic work has generated a significant amount of debate and reflection among HE researchers. Indeed, his piece has had a powerful role in shaping my own doctoral research, in particular my desire to examine the affective context of contemporary university life.

We can also trace calls for new forms of description across the cultural studies research surveyed throughout this thesis. According to Cvetkovich, there have been a number of projects that attempt to create accounts that are ‘more textured, more localized, and also less predictably foregone in their conclusions’ (2012b, p. 12). She traces a form related to ethnographic fiction, creative non-fiction, which has been practised by the anthropologist Kathleen Stewart (2007). As Cvetkovich (2012b) argues, these forms of writing ‘often turn the ordinary into a scene of surprise, and they slow down so as to be able to immerse themselves in detail and to appreciate the way that magic and mystery sit alongside the banal and the routine’ (Cvetkovich, 2012b, p. 11). However, projects that seek to document the everyday do more than just paint a picture: ‘richer accounts of the ordinary….are also ways of providing the more systemic accounts of power that have been central to cultural studies’ (Cvetkovich, 2012b, p. 11). Building on this work, Cvetkovich (2012b) has offered her own turn to description, a form of memoir/criticism on depression. Her account is set in her working context of academia, ‘where the pressure to succeed and the desire to find space for creative
thinking bump up against the harsh conditions of a ruthlessly competitive job market, the shrinking power of the humanities, and the corporatization of the university’ (Cvetkovich, 2012b, p. 17). She describes her project on depression as an ‘episodic narrative about how academia seemed to be killing me’ (2012b, p. 18), and states that her goal is to write about depression in a way that ‘simultaneously captures how it feels and provides an analysis of why and how its feelings are produced by social forces’ (Cvetkovich, 2012b, p. 14). Cvetkovich (2012b) also attunes readers to the differentiated expectations of this kind of work, from more conventional academic texts: ‘Ideally, I’d like those forms of testimony to offer some clues about how to survive those conditions and even to change them, but I’d also settle for compelling description’ (Cvetkovich, 2012b, p. 15).

The ethnographic fiction that I present in this chapter builds on the work I have surveyed above (Cvetkovich, 2012b; Stewart, 2007). It is called Doctoral Induction Day, and is based upon notes I made as I undertook my own compulsory doctoral induction in 2012. The spark that prompted me to write this fiction was my reluctance to actually take part in the event itself. Indeed, I delayed participating until the very end of my first doctoral year. One day, I was talking to a friend about how frustrated I felt about being compelled to travel to attend the event. My friend offered some helpful advice. Would it be possible, he asked, for me to do something with my frustration? Could I attend the event in the ‘role’ of an ethnographer, rather than reluctant doctoral student? The possibility that I could arrive in character appealed to me immensely! If I was compelled to attend the induction, I figured, that at least might I go more on my own terms, redirecting my gaze onto the induction process itself. I determined to go as a ‘researcher’, taking down notes about what I observed, and how I felt before,
during and after the induction\textsuperscript{26}. In the months following, I began to carefully review these observations, eventually turning them into the fictional account presented here. The story has been extended by my reading of the accounts of the ten doctoral students who participated in my PhD research, many of whom also spoke about their own doctoral inductions, and their experiences in the first year of their PhDs more broadly.

*Doctoral Induction Day* accounts for some of the affective formations that appear to stick to doctoral education in the present. I will unpack some of these ideas in the analysis that follows.

**Doctoral induction day\textsuperscript{27}**

‘Just get up.’ Tom spoke flatly, tugging open the curtains. He’d been awake for an hour already, and seemed bored by the wake-up ritual he’d begun performing daily.

‘No. I’m tired. I need just five minutes.’ Lew pleaded as he pulled a pillow smelling faintly of his uncle away from his face.

‘You have to be at the airport by seven and you know what fascists Air-Square are, if you’re late they won’t let you on, and since I don’t know the roads yet it will take me longer to drive, and…’

\textsuperscript{26}Autoethnographic work, like all research, requires careful ethical consideration (see Tolich, 2010). While many autoethnographers have tended to view the stories they tell as theirs alone, I accept that others are often implicated in accounts of the author. In writing this ethnographic fiction I have been mindful of the privacy of others. Each of the characters in the story (including the protagonist) are fictional. These characters were compiled from my encounters with multiple people (both present and absent from the induction) and extended by my own imagination. Where I felt that these fictional characters may be interpreted as resembling ‘real’ people who were present at the induction, I have undertaken additional blurring.

\textsuperscript{27}A version of this ethnographic fiction has been published as ‘Doctoral induction day: An ethnographic fiction on doctoral emotions’ in J. Smith, J. Rattray, T. Peseta & D. Loads (Eds.). *Identity-work in the contemporary university: Exploring an uneasy profession*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 117-128.
‘OK, OK’ Lew sat up, swinging his legs down with dramatic effect to meet the collection of washed clothes that still blanketed the floor several months into their move back to his uncle’s house. He felt nausea churning in his stomach.

‘Oh, and there’s a mess in the toilet’ Tom reported factually.

Lew nodded and made his way to their bathroom. Though still waking up, his thoughts turned to the instructions he’d leave for his uncle and brother for the next few days while he was away in the city. Whenever he went out for longer than a few hours he’d write a note of instructions and cello tape it onto the kitchen table. He’d probably check in a couple of times with his younger brother Edwin. He’d be checking in on Aunty Suze.

Aunty Suze was an alcoholic. Well, now she was sober, but only because she was sick and they’d taken her car keys. No one was sure what was wrong exactly. But for the last five months she’d sat on the couch, watching re-runs of Border Patrol and Ellen.

When she got out of hospital last time, Edwin had called, ‘It’s not looking good,’ he said, ‘I’d say at this rate she’s only got one year left’.

Lew decided to head home. He really shouldn’t have been driving. He sped through small towns singing Mahalia Jackson’s version of ‘Summertime’:

Sometime I feel
Like a motherless child
Just alone
Long way,
From my home

Lew let out a whimper when he saw Aunty, shrunken and pale. She couldn’t even get out of bed to greet him. Her sheets were stained and her nails were dirty.

He dropped everything and moved in. He quit his job (he’d wanted to anyway), packed his suitcase, put Romeo the cat in a cage and went home. Sometime later Tom joined him. Lew suspended his PhD for three months and became the main caregiver for Aunty Suze, nursing her six days a week. The lady from Nurse Maude would drop in too, but she was just for showers every second day, and if Aunty Suze didn’t want a shower, she wouldn’t force her. Most of the time she’d be in for a cup of tea then off again.

On Sundays Lew would drive into the hills, park up and read a book or an article. He was trying to keep his PhD ticking over, but it was a challenge. Aunty Suze would be OK some days, and he’d get at least a couple of hours in. But other days she was a tyrant. Yesterday she’d refused to eat, or take her pills, burying them in the dirt of a dried-out pot plant. He threatened to take her back to hospital into the care of the nurses she’d nicknamed Mussolini and Hitler.

‘What’s the difference?’ she’d replied.
Tom was waiting in the car when Lew finally got out the door. They drove silently down the streets, still broken and marked by cones since the earthquakes several years back. They had to take a circuitous route down the road by the beach and past the pier to get to New Brighton’s main drag. The sky was sombre, and the pier itself loomed like a concrete scrum braced against southern winds.

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Lew had planned to sleep on the flight, because it was still early but ended up reading instead. He was going to the city to attend the doctoral induction, and sit a compulsory English language test for all new doctoral students. The email reminders from the school manager Rachel had been polite and encouraging at first, later brusque and vaguely threatening. If he didn’t complete the tasks before the end of the provisional year, his candidature could not be confirmed. Flying to the city was expensive, and inconvenient at the best of times, but he bristled even more now that Aunty was sick. He was pretty sure his brother wouldn’t convince her to take her pills, that would mean arriving home to more soiled bed sheets, and trying to get her strength up again.

Sitting in the doctoral lounge Lew felt anxious, both about the requirement to meet new people, and about what might (or might not) be happening at home. He felt guilty leaving his family with Aunty. After all, his brother was only sixteen, and everyone knew she listened to Lew. Guilt and hunger clawed at his stomach. He looked around for coffee but saw only carafes of water.

The induction proper began with introductions in small groups. Lew sat facing two mid-thirties women, one blonde and one brunette, who were both stylishly dressed, and next to a thin and handsome man who appeared to be in his late twenties. The thin man began, ‘well, I guess I can start, my name is Garoon, I am studying geology, and what I want to know today is who decides which person gets a scholarship? I don’t have a scholarship yet and I am paying for my studies myself. I am not a rich person and it is quite expensive, you know? Everyone needs money, right?’

Garoon’s question is met with embarrassed nods by the other three who, it transpires, have each secured scholarships. The question flashes like a car crash in front of Lew. The A’s on his transcript, always shimmery and somewhat hard to grasp now felt more distant than ever.

‘I didn’t do well in one of my courses for my Masters’, Garoon continued, ‘but it was the most difficult course in the faculty. I feel I am being punished for that. And who decides whether the research is important or not?’
Amanda writes down Garoon’s question, adding that they can ask the facilitator later. She seems keen to contain Garoon, given that his introduction alone has taken up three-quarters of the time they had to complete the task. Maria introduces herself next, and Amanda beside her. They are both students in psychology and work in the same lab looking at pain thresholds. Maria is wearing a navy dress and has a neck full of pearls. She folds her legs, leans forward and indicates that she wants to know if doctoral students can work overseas, as her husband is an engineer and can’t find a decent job in the city. Amanda is also well dressed, with high boots and a high ponytail. Her rural vibe contrasts with Maria’s urban chic. She is interested in exchange programmes. He isn’t sure but Lew thinks he hears Amanda refer to her partner using the pronoun ‘she’. He wants to find some way to clarify and connect, but their ten minutes is almost up.

Lew goes last, describing his own PhD topic. His face is flushed as he talks about his Master’s experience, he fumbles at the hook of connecting this to his current topic and is interrupted by the facilitator, Kim, who introduces a guest, The Dean of postgraduate studies.

The Dean is plainly dressed. He has not prepared advice, and will instead respond to students’ questions. Lew zones out as one seemingly obvious question after another is put forward. The Dean speaks mindfully, like a diplomat, tries to balance friendly ‘I’ve been there too’ with his role as handmaiden of the university.

‘By original we mean you can’t just repeat someone else’s study, you have to change some aspect to it. Perhaps you use a different method for your experiments, for example. You also cannot use material from your Masters research. It must be original research. In reality most PhDs are simply moving the literature forward, incrementally, they are not going to make a big impact. Some do, but most gather dust. PhD students need to come to terms with this.’

‘Hardly inspiring is it?’ Lew whispers at Maria who appears similarly disaffected, and has begun to draw pictures of playschool-style houses on a notepad in front of her.

‘If you hate writing, think about how you will manage a whole PhD. It really isn’t for everyone. And unfortunately a number of students aren’t prepared for the realities when they begin, that is why we have days like this. And as many of you know, a number of students who begin their studies don’t complete them, and personally I don’t think that is a bad thing. It is better than it used to be, but non-completion is a reality of the degree.’

‘I don’t have the attrition rates on me, but, ah let me rephrase this, what I wish to say is, we are glad you’re here, the university wants as many postgraduates as possible. But, if you do have troubles early, think carefully
about whether this is for you. There are many different paths you could take in
life, the PhD is only one.’

As Lew hears these comments he immediately redirects them onto the
bodies of other students in the room. He is sure he is doctoral material. He has
already written off other options anyway.

‘Some students find receiving feedback very difficult’, The Dean
continued, ‘you need to develop a thick skin, toughen up a bit. This is just the
way the academy works. We all get harsh feedback, even established academics,
so you mustn’t take it personally. There are also eight free sessions of counselling
available per year. The university has budgeted for these, so you might as well
use them.’

Lew has already used five of his eight free sessions and hates the idea of
thick skin. ‘Harden up’ is The Dean’s message. He gets it. It is the message he has
heard in schools his whole life:

‘Man-up’
‘Don’t be a pussy’
‘Chick-chick-chick-chicken’

He appreciates The Dean’s intent, but he wonders if he ever dreamed it
otherwise...

‘We do what you might call surveillance. The PhD is not a walled garden
anymore. We don’t leave students out there in the wilderness like the old days.
There are now a set of guidelines, and responsibilities for doctoral students and
supervisors. Ultimately this is a good thing. You might say we are being cruel to
be kind.’

The Dean’s mouth forms a smile as he utters that final sentence. The
thought of surveillance gives Lew the creeps, but he enjoys the image of the
walled garden. He thinks of white and purple orchids, moss-covered rocks, and
ponds of writhing koi carp.

The session has run over time. Kim announces that the final question will
be Garoon’s. He begins speaking about his failure to get a scholarship at length,
including individual grades, and the performance of his lecturer in GEOL419.
Lew shifts the weight of his body to the right, away from him. Aware that
Garoon is a talker, Kim the facilitator interrupts and directs the question to The
Dean. He pauses for a long moment, before answering,

‘Thanks for your question. The University allocates each faculty a number
of positions each year, they have their own selection processes, but in general
you must meet two criteria. Firstly, you must have a high GPA, ah grade point
average, and secondly your proposed research must be recognised as significant.
It sounds like you did not have a sufficiently high GPA and will be unlikely to
receive a scholarship from this university. This is unfortunate for you, but we
only have a set number of scholarships that the university can afford, and many more students. Therefore we give scholarships only to the highest achieving students. We can’t discuss the difficulties of any particular course, we just allow the grades to speak, in the end. That is the fairest way of doing it... for everyone.”

Garoon begins to respond, obviously stung by the Dean’s response, but is interrupted by Kim, who announces it is lunchtime.

Lew lingers in his seat, watching Maria and Amanda and hoping they will want to chat about the last session. Instead, they gather their bags and head out for lunch off-campus. Lew gets up after them, queues for one of the sandwiches provided, and heads over to the computer in the left-hand corner of the room. He notices a number of students have formed a semicircle around Garoon who expands on his story. Lew spends lunchtime online. He emails his uncle reminding him to go to the community law centre and investigate getting power of attorney for Aunty. Halfway through lunch a message arrives from Rachel, the manager of his faculty, who he still hasn’t met one year in to his PhD:

To: lewis.archer@gmail.com; bcb@city.ac.nz; hrs@city.ac.nz
Subject: Urgent – progress report/doctrinal goals

Dear Lewis,

I am emailing again because you have not yet replied to my last message about your provisional doctoral goals. All City University doctoral students must complete the ten goals in order to be confirmed as full doctoral candidates within the first year of their enrolment. You have not yet submitted your annual progress report, which outlines whether or not you have met the goals. I need this urgently so I can report on your progress to graduate studies and the scholarships office. Please advise when you will submit the annual progress report. I have cc'd your supervisors into this email.
Thank you in advance.

Kind regards.
Rachel

Lew reads the email twice. His hands feel cold and his face is flushed red. He feels caught out. Of course he has made progress in the first year of his PhD, but he has only met just over half the goals he is supposed to have completed by next month. After today another one will be ticked off. He notices that his original view of these goals as jumping through unnecessary hoops is unsettled by another feeling. He doesn’t want to keep being told off. Rachel doesn’t seem like the kind of manager who is going to let things slide anyway.
To: r.conner@city.ac.nz  
Subject: RE: Urgent – progress report/doctrinal goals

Hi Rachel,
I am sorry I didn’t reply sooner. I was on suspension and have just come back to study, so I haven’t been checking my emails as regularly. I am happy to send through the progress report to you – I am almost there! I am at the doctoral induction today, and hope to complete the English test tomorrow. That just leaves me with submitting my ethics forms, and the comprehensive piece of writing. I will organise a presentation next time I come up to the city.

Apologies for my delay and for making things difficult for you.

Best wishes,
Lew

Lew feels motivated to finish today and get on with the other goals. At least it’d keep Rachel out of his inbox. He also feels a sense of achievement that he now has no unread emails; this feeling borders on a sense of superiority over the other doctoral students who sit chatting about their topics.

His thoughts return to Uncle and Aunty. Aunty had two degrees, arts and science, and always advised Lew against doing a PhD. Uncle had none and was proud of Lew. But every time he talked about going to Lew’s masters graduation he emphasised the hotel Lew had organised for them in the city,

‘They had a cooked brekkie, bacon, hashbrowns, fried tomatoes, fried mushrooms. But they had poached eggs, and no fried bread’!

‘I said, “you can’t have a fry-up without fried eggs, or fried bread”. I spoke to the waitress girl, and she got a bloke out from the kitchen. I had to teach him how to cook fried bread!’

Kim re-enters the room. She and her colleague had left for lunch. She asks students to mark themselves against the roll again. Lew obliges with a flourish that the small box given fails to contain. The next session is the fundamentals of doctoral study: time-management, writing and examination. The session starts with the facilitators asking questions to establish the backgrounds of the students present. Lew learns he is the only geographer at the induction and feels relieved. He is not one to keep in touch afterwards.

The beginning of the session keeps Lew’s interest. The facilitators talk about the history of the doctoral degree, but he zones out completely for the discussion that follows. It is focused on time-management, one topic that always seems so high-schooingly. He stares out the window at the students scurrying between wet concrete buildings. One woman appears to slip over on the tiles, and is helped up by another. Almost immediately after, they depart in different directions.
Lew is warmed up to the section on writing. The facilitators ask the students to position themselves as ‘reluctant’ or ‘confident’ writers. Lew identifies with both, but knows the correct answer for someone like him is ‘confident’. The session is well facilitated, guided at the beginning, then opens out to a discussion.

‘So what makes good writing?’ Kim asks.

A short, middle-aged man’s wrist shoots up, he answers, ‘Good writing is clear, to the point, not unnecessarily verbose.’

‘Good.’ Kim responds, writing words on the board. ‘Any other thoughts? What kind of writing do you like to read?’

This question prompts quiet discussions to emerge across the seminar room. A pale, red haired woman responds,

‘Obviously it should be objective and in formal academic style. My pet peeve is really wordy writing. I think often academics are just hiding behind big words and theories and stuff because they don’t know what they are talking about. It actually takes much more intelligence to make it simpler.’

Laughter breaks out, which encourages Red to continue.

‘I have been a tutor for undergrad classes, and when you mark their essays it is always the ones who write succinctly that actually know what they are talking about. I think too often people use their thesaurus. Academic writing should be straightforward. Anybody should be able to read it if you do it carefully. You also have to watch that they don’t let their bias come into their writing.’ Lew is bored by these pronouncements. They come up every single time. His confidence waivers, but he puts up his hand to respond.

‘Yes,’ Kim gestures toward him.

‘I think good writing comes in lots of different styles and ... genres. Personally, I like writing that is challenging, that requires different kinds of reading. Sometimes complex writing is a part of the work of the text’. The words come out slippery and he is aware that he is precisely the kind of academic-to-be Red doesn’t approve of.

‘I enjoy reading queer theory, for example, because it is challenging, it often pushes me, and makes me think. I enjoy the playfulness of it and I don’t think it’s lazy. I think it can be choiceful actually, and tactical. I would find it problematic for us to label ‘good’ writing as clear and straightforward and ‘bad’ writing as complex. Yeah and, what I like to read, or write may not be the same as you...’

Lew realises his contribution has been a stretch. He has possibly outed himself, and his penchant for complex, elitist, faggoty, writing. His voice comes out low and measured, but he feels screechy. Again, his face is flushed. He keeps talking, wants to win the point, ‘I think it is really important that as new
...academics we can write differently too, sometimes I want to speak softer, and sometimes my writing is angry, I guess. In my writing I want to be a living, breathing, human being who cares about this stuff, you know? I want people to feel it. There needs to be space for that. That is what I think, I guess.’

Kim seems pleased by the contrary points that have emerged and stokes the conversation further.

‘So we have two different views here about what good writing is. Any other perspectives?’

Several people raise their hands. They each largely disagree with Lew, and direct their responses to Kim who notes their contributions on the whiteboard. It reveals an outline of writing as a tool, which merely transmits.

Lew considers replying again. He feels passionate, defensive. His own experience is that standard advice for academic writing would leave it deadening, always a carbon copy of the writing before it. Ultimately, he can’t be bothered going back for seconds. It’s a tough crowd.

The final session is the thesis examination process. Lew prepares bullet points in anticipation. He wonders why he has never really thought about the end of his thesis, which is supposed to be only two years away. He does think about the possible examiners though. He likes searching for their photos, on university websites, Academia.edu, Twitter accounts...

The day is to conclude with a session on library and computer skills. He follows the rest of the students down the flight of stairs, spots Maria and nods. She flashes him a weary smile. He has already been marked present for the second half of the day so he decides to bunk it. He walks up to the facilitator and explains he is having a migraine and needs to lie down. He waves to Maria and Amanda on the way out, but they don’t see him, already busy undertaking the set of searches given to them by the librarian.

Once outside of the computer room, his mind turns to booking his English test. Maybe he’d have time if he got there before four? He has to find the office first and that might take a while because it is somewhere across campus, and it’s still raining. But first he needs to pee. He walks to the bathrooms one floor down from the doctoral lounge. He moves quickly, eyes cast downward. Lew enters the cubicle and locks the door. Sitting on the toilet he reaches for his mobile but knows it hasn’t buzzed. There is no one to message, he just has to wait. He lets out a sigh and can feel it coming. A wave. Of what? Grief? Shame? Anger? Despair? In the end it is something more ordinary. The desire to just keep moving. He gathers himself together and decides to get the English test over and done with. At least it’d be another thing to tick off the list.
Reflections on Doctoral Induction Day

I will confess some mixed feelings about offering a commentary on this ethnographic fiction. I am aware of the awkwardness that can arise from trying to be both the author of a story, and its analyst. There is also something to be said for the possibilities that may be opened by a writer stepping back and letting the fiction go its own way. This is what Sparkes refers to as the researcher ‘relinquishing control’ of interpretation:

inviting an aesthetic reading whereby readers interpret the text from their own unique vantage points, contributing their own questions-answers-experiences to the story as they read it, as co-participants in the creation of meaning (Sparkes, 2007, p. 540)

Sparkes came to a judgement in his ethnographic fiction that ‘the story must do its own work, on its own, as a story’ (2007, p. 540). He elected to close his (2007) piece with reflections from seven readers and two reviewers, each of whom unpacked the meanings they took from the story, and reflected on broader possibilities opened by its methodological innovations. While I share Sparke’s inclination to ‘relinquish control’, earlier readers of this story pressed me to offer a fuller analytic account of ‘Doctoral Induction Day’, and I have been persuaded. Readers called me to consider both ‘the pedagogic responsibility of the academic researcher’, as well as the conventions of a doctoral dissertation, and the forms of analytic performance this typically demands. In this case I think they are right. The story, in this context, benefits from having some of its meanings drawn out. Yet, in offering this commentary I am mindful that texts have meanings beyond the intent of their author. I merely wish to offer some observations and pose some questions in order to facilitate further debate about the way stories such as
this might surface affective ‘forms of survival in the face of the challenges of daily [doctoral] life’ (Cvetkovich, 2012b, p. 155).

My primary objective with *Doctoral Induction Day* was to set a story inside the broader ‘change to the cultural life of the university’ (Lynch, 2010, p. 55) that is tracked across this thesis. In this sense the story can be seen in the context of a number of autoethnographic accounts written by current, or recently graduated doctoral students who have critically reflected on the experience of contemporary doctoral life and study (Bansel, 2011; Prasad, 2013; Lee, 2005; Raineri, 2013, 2015). I wanted to foreground a scene where the dynamics of doctoral intensification, surveillance and competitive-individualism are vividly portrayed. This work began by centering the story at a compulsory induction day, an example of the performative exercises that are multiplying across doctoral education systems. In the middle of the story we learn that this induction is but one of ten pre-determined ‘goals’ that Lew has to meet to be confirmed as a doctoral candidate during his first year of study. While attendance reminders were ‘polite and encouraging at first,’ Lew describes them becoming ‘brusque and vaguely threatening’. The ‘Induction Day’ itself can be recognised as ‘what you might call surveillance’, and evidence that the PhD is no longer a ‘walled garden’. Increasingly, the relationships between doctoral students and supervisors have become more open to institutional scrutiny, and are often now mediated by a number of policies and procedures – which can increase opportunities for students to hold the university and their supervisors accountable. While the ‘set of guidelines and responsibilities’ is framed as an act of ‘kindness’, and a taming of the ‘wilderness’ of the ‘old days’, there is an implicit acknowledgment of the ‘cruelty’ this also imposes: the reduction in
autonomy, the intensified expectations and the normative regulations that are applied across the board.

If we stay with this middle section of the story, a number of other angles come to view. We might look closely at the somewhat frosty ‘welcome’ to doctoral study. Not only are students reminded that their research will probably make a small impact, we also hear that many in the audience won’t actually make it to the end, because ‘non-completion is a reality of the degree’. While universities want ‘as many postgraduates’ as possible to bolster their prestige and economic performance (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2015), it seems that some wastage is already calculated into the business plan. As I have argued throughout this thesis, the stresses and intensification of the PhD creates a shaky platform for students to create emotional wellbeing. This appears to be recognised by The Dean, who notes there are ‘eight free sessions of counseling available per year’. Yet after informing students of their entitlement, he reduces the offering by stating ‘The university has budgeted for these, so you might as well use them’.28

Beyond the setting of the story, we might take note of the affective performances of its characters. As Lew ‘gathers himself’ and contemplates sitting his compulsory English test at the end of the story, I wonder whether he evokes something about doing emotion work in the doctoral present moment. Perhaps, like academics, doctoral students are at a similar affective and embodied ‘breaking point’. Yet, as the story suggests, this breaking point might lack the drama of a ‘snap!’, and manifest itself more quietly. Maybe ‘doing doctoralness’

28 Readers have asked if dialogue like this is to be believed. In response I can only say that the words are true to my own felt experience of the induction, and other interactions with administrators in the first year of my PhD.
now is often about compartmentalising, coping, muddling along, and moving to the next thing on your list. While I have been able to describe such an affective practice (in the following chapter, Chapter 3), it seems that by using the character of Lew, and the genre of ethnographic fiction, I am able to be more descriptive, and open out the ‘the intensity and texture’ (Stewart, 2007, p. 4) of this affective scene.

Perhaps the most significant thread in the story is the testimony to the complexity and unpredictability of doctoral worlds. While universities might idealise particular doctoral identities, students’ actual lived lives may well be ‘more particular, more interesting, more ethical, more political, more nuanced, than our institutions can dream of’ (Grant et. al, 2016, p. 129). In particular I think the larger narrative that the story offers is one of the conflicts that can arise between the fantasy of the ‘independent, autonomous scholar’ (Johnson, Lee & Green, 2000) and students’ realities of a ‘care-full’ (Lynch, 2010) home life. Within postgraduate pedagogy, the fantasy of ‘autonomy is achieved by rejecting the emotions, embodiment and human dependency’ (p. 140); however, Lew’s life involves a substantial amount of relational work caring for his sick relative. In the story the auditing process of the university does not bend to Lew’s circumstances; he needs to complete the induction on time, or he risks having his scholarship cut. This situation is far from uncommon. As Lynch argues, within the university there is a ‘deep disrespect for the relationally engaged, caring citizen’ (2010, p. 63, see also Lolich, 2011). The university has cultivated ‘a particular “care-less” form of competitive individualism’ (Lynch, 2010, p. 57), whereby the idealised subject is one who is ‘available 24/7 without ties or responsibilities that will hinder her or his productive capacities’ (Lynch, 2010, p. 57). The caregiving undertaken by Lew in the story helps to extend research on
academic families (Hook, 2015b), which has problematised the underlying notion that ‘to be a successful academic is to be unencumbered by caring’ (Lynch, 2010, p. 63). While Lew’s gender identity is never explicitly stated, I read the story as offering a more nuanced account of the gendering of care in higher education. While often the imperative is placed on women to do care work and men are expected to ‘care-less’ (Lynch, 2010, p. 54), this story provides an account of a person who may not be a woman, but who also struggles with doctoral and care work.

**Research poetry**

Research poetry is another evocative genre for academic writing (Faulkner, 2007; Fitzpatrick & Fitzpatrick, 2015; Jones, 2010; Lahman et al., 2010; Lahman et al., 2011; Prendergast, Leggo & Sameshima, 2009; Quinlan, 2013; Richardson, 1992, 1994a; M. Richardson, 1998). According to McCulliss (2013, p. 89), it can be separated into three broad categories: ‘literature-voiced’ poems that are written in response to academic texts; ‘researcher-voiced poems’ that draw on field notes, and/or autoethnographic writing; or ‘participant-voiced poems’ generated from transcriptions of interview data (Davies & Petersen, 2005a; Elizabeth & Grant, 2013; Glesne, 1997; Madison, 1993; Poindexter, 2002) or solicited from participants directly. Across each of these categories, ‘research poetry’ tends to be characterised by:

an economy or concentration on language, the consideration of the emotional and aesthetic qualities of the words chosen and a focus on providing new insight or revelation that can be visceral as well as intellectual (Jones, 2010, p. 594)
Poetry’s introduction to research has been facilitated by postmodern critiques of academic writing, ‘where scholars and researchers question the traditional, scientific, authoritarian stance of research presentation’ (Glesne, 1997, p. 214). Proponents of poetry argue that its compressed form and generic conventions produce a different mode of representation. As Cahnmann (2003) argues, ‘Just as the microscope and camera have allowed different ways for us to see what would otherwise be invisible, so too poetry and prose are different mediums that give rise to ways of saying what might not otherwise be expressed’ (p. 31). Poetry’s open form is often viewed as a strength, as is the way that it ‘leaves frayed edges and loose wires’ (McBride, 2009, p. 43) for readers to make sense of themselves.

Laurel Richardson was an early proponent of the genre, arguing that poetry is particularly useful for ethnographic writers who wish to evoke the textures of a research field. Rather than asking whether the poetic and ethnographic might align, she reversed the question, asking instead: ‘When is poetry not ethnographic?’ (Richardson, 1994a). According to Richardson, it is the poem’s task to represent ‘episodes, epiphanies, misfortunes, pleasures – to capture those experiences in such a way that others can experience and feel them…’ (Richardson, 1994a, p. 12). This is a point echoed by Elizabeth and Grant (2013), who argue that poetry might, ‘produce a different kind of interaction between the writer and the reader’ (p. 130), an interaction modulated by the reverberating quality of poetic texts, the ways they may move the emotions and bodies of academic readers.

Research poetry continues to occupy a marginal space in education studies, with much education-related poetry being published outside of its disciplinary
journals. Such poems tend to be published in venues such as *Qualitative Inquiry* (e.g. Connor & colleagues, 2004; Davis, 2007; Fitzpatrick & Fitzpatrick, 2015; Newton, 2005; Prendergast, 2009; Teman, 2016), or *Cultural Studies <> Critical Methodologies* (e.g. de Vries, 2006; Fitzpatrick, 2012, Perselli, 2004; Pelias, 2005). However, when such education research poetry is collated together, it quickly becomes clear that there is a rich body of work to survey. Looking to higher education research, in particular, we see a diverse array of thematic concerns addressed through poetic methods. Many researchers have drawn on poetry to explore social marginalisation and academic identity including Hill’s (2005) poetic portraits of Black women academics in the US, Clark/Keefe’s (2006) poetry on working class and first-generation academics, and my own poems on the complex pleasure-pains of queer student research (Burford, 2012). Other higher education researchers have taken up poetry to foreground the affective nature of academic practices, such as Jones’ (2010) work on the relationship between personal histories, discipline and teaching; Grant and Elizabeth’s (2013) poems on research under managerialism; and, Fitzpatrick and Fitzpatrick’s (2015) publication of poems shared between them as supervisor and supervisee.

The poems that I present in this chapter were written in the (southern hemisphere) summer break of 2012-2013. They are part of a wider suite of creative practices I have engaged in during my doctorate which have focused on my ordinary life as a PhD student. In addition to writing poetry, I have also written ethnographic snippets on: (not) writing (Burford, 2014c), conference presentations and dancing at a conference disco (Burford & Henderson, 2015) and getting dressed for academic events (Grant et al., 2016). Other activities have included taking a series of self-portraits writing at my desk which explore the stillness and meditative qualities of the act, and a photographic diary called
Desserts I ate at work which documents the practice of seeking ‘cushions’ of enjoyment (Helms, Vishmidt, Berlant, 2010) within the ordinary grind of (academic) working life. My initial motivation to explore poetry in 2012 was rather practical. Given poetry is known as the most ‘economical’ of the arts (Lorde, 1984, p. 116), I had hoped that producing less text might allow my neck and shoulders time to recover from the intensive desk work I had been doing over the preceding months. This practical concern was coupled with an intellectual curiosity about the sociological possibilities of poetry. I had dabbled with poetry in the past (Burford, 2012, 2013) and had recently had some poems accepted for a collection of ‘socio-poetic’ texts by New Zealand sociologists (Curtis & Meager, 2013).

Another concern that led me toward experimenting with poetry was my interest in the quotidian practices of doctoral writing (Aitchison & Lee, 2006). I had observed a trend in higher education scholarship whereby the intense affective performances and events recognisable as ‘crises’ seemed to be privileged over quietly unfolding ones. I hoped that using poetry as a research practice (Cahnmann, 2003) might enable me to contemplate the mundane, everyday practices of my doctoral writing and to view even quiet and ordinary events as data. This was a movement (or indeed, a stillness and being-withness) inspired by ethnographers such as Kathleen Stewart (2007). By ‘poking around poetically’ (Lahman et al., 2010, p. 39), I thought I might be able to differently attend to and represent ordinary features of my doctoral life, and attempt to evoke for readers why those feelings matter.

Given that I am myself a student who is writing a doctorate about the contemporary doctoral experience, I decided to draw on my own
autoethnographic reflections, and create ‘researcher-voiced’ poems. By autoethnographic, I mean that my project was intended to generate meaning from my own experience, to put the ‘autobiographical and personal’ into conversation with the ‘cultural and social’ (Ellis, 2004, p. 375). Each day I tried to make time to sit down and journal some reflections about my doctoral life. I would often begin with simple things: its smells, its sounds, the feelings I noticed, and things I did with my body. This would often be enough to get me thinking. I was also open to inspiration. If reflections, strings of words, or rhythms came to me while walking on the beach, reading, or cooking lunch, I would make time to note these down. Often the poems took shape quite quickly, and were edited very slowly, often over many months and sometimes years. In total I drafted 15 poems during the summer of 2012-2013. I have selected three to use as data for this thesis, based on their relevance to developing accounts about the affective-politics of doctoral education.

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29 I do acknowledge the constructed nature of the self (my self) presented in the poems. As Kelly (2015) has argued, ‘It is a textual self, a discursive construct, yet it is also in some sense “authentic”, my own’ (p. 1155).
Verbs of the moment

I heard it is a faux pas to admit to academic fandom
But
I’m gonna risk it anyway:
I am a screaming fan-boi of Lauren Berlant
I just read her chapter Starved (Berlant, 2011b)
In a paragraph,
She detailed her favourite verbs of the 1990s
The ones she’d marshalled to the task
Of persuading students to unlearn their attachments to normativity,
‘With its compulsive formalism and unimaginative be-gooderness’ (p. 81)
Her favourite was to lubricate
I’m transfixed!
Roll the word over my tongue,
Savour its sound and signal
Her second favourite was to delaminate
Involuntarily, my two first fingers curl into my thumb
As if to check my nails are long enough for the task (they are)
I locate my own favourite verbs of the present:

To puncture

To unsettle.

To fructify.
Fat writing

He asks me to trim the fat off my writing
And advises on style
As if he were Gok Wan
Concealing a flabby tum
Within ‘flattering’ garments
Of course, low cut for those of us with cleavage
But always covering those unsightly upper arms

For me
A chunky paragraph or three, is one of life’s pleasures
It takes up space, without apology
So indulgent and oooooozy
I want to lick my fingers afterwards
And take a nap.

I want corpulent, curvy words
Words with weight
That stand solidly against
The Lean Mean Machine.
Even sickly sweet, or cheesy words have their place at the table.

I’m certainly a fan of no-nos
Like over-embellishment (too many rings, pattern-on-pattern)
It’s as if he got dressed in the dark!
Maybe it’s a queer thing
That I like the writers who won’t make it onto the cover of
Academic Vogue
The beauty school drop-outs
Whose words creep down my forearm like a sleeve tattoo.

30 Gok Wan is an English fashion consultant. He is the former host of the television show How to Look Good Naked.


**Workaday Writing**

Over canapés  
He asks them  
How they write

The first, a woman  
Past middle age  
With a crisp countenance  
Requires silence  
Nothing less than a vacated house  
Spouse, pets dispatched  
Clock batteries removed.

The second, a woman  
With dark hair  
Tied efficiently in a bun  
Likes salsa music softly playing  
White paper  
And a row of sharpened pencils.

The third, a man  
Jokes about the sacrifices he makes  
To an altar for his Inner Critic:  
Fresh mandarins and cheap incense,  
But really he just writes anywhere, everyday,  
Which is sort of the same thing.

The fourth, a man  
Writes in cafes  
Requires the proximity of others  
To feel conversational.
A commentary on the poems

My intention in producing these poems was to generate ethnographic detail and evoke affective texture by drawing on my own experience as a doctoral researcher. Given that the purpose of autoethnography is to analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand broader cultural phenomena (ethno) (Ellis, 2004), I have intended these poems to surface affective-political questions. Again, I wish to offer a series of thoughts in order to gesture toward some possible approaches to reading the poems, without sealing up the ‘frayed edges and loose wires’ (McBride, 2009, p. 43) that are such valuable qualities of poems. The first piece, Verbs of the moment, has a methodological orientation. I am struck by my own description of the pleasures of academic reading, and the particular pleasures I have found in reading across queer theory. Reading and writing emerge as sensual practices, things we might become transfixed and seduced by, things we might wish to savour. I notice myself – the novice scholar – discovering and playing with academic voice, and trying on the words of others for size. I think about how my body arrives in the poem, hearing myself purr lubricate and observing my ‘long enough’ fingernails ready to delaminate, to peel back what goes by as largely unseen. I notice my verbs of that moment. I read them individually. Puncture. Unsettle. Fructify. And then I read them together as a queer sequence: puncturing through and unsettling can be fertile, can produce. These words bring me back to the aim of this chapter, which is to invert the ‘normal’ generic practices of academic writing, to see what modes of writing outside of these borders may be of use. It also connects me back to the wider methodological purpose of this thesis, which is to explore what queer concepts can do in higher education research (Rasmussen & Allen, 2014).
In the second poem – *Fat writing* – I notice the juxtaposition of writing, the neoliberal university and fatness. The poem was provoked by my observations of the circulation of ‘fat language’ within academic writing pedagogies and research; all the trimming, tightening and counting that is urged on. Readers can look for example, at Helen Sword’s *Writer’s diet*, which includes a diagnostic scale for users to input their own writing, stretching from “Lean” to “Heart Attack”. We might also think about the recent trendiness of doctoral writing “Boot Camps” which arguably build on the popularity of intensive exercise culture in order to publicly discipline doctoral students into binge-writing vast amounts of text. The ‘boot camp’ phenomenon is quite a different proposition to other writing interventions, such as the idea of the writing ‘retreat’ that I used as a part of the research design for this thesis (see Chapters 1 & 6). While the writing retreats I have attended have often integrated writing with a host of other activities, boot camps tend to have a more singular focus on the speedy production of text. Reading the poem, once again I notice my interest in the pleasures of writing, and the pleasures of reading queer research. The poem goads me to ask: how might excessive, oooooozy writing play out in the current academic moment of The Lean Mean Machine? And, what might doctoral writing look like if one pursued a practice of ‘fat’ writing?

The origins of the final poem emerged from my reflections on a conference. There, I was fortunate to meet a number of delegates who are recognised as outstanding academic writers within their fields. Over meal breaks at this event, I often introduced myself and my doctoral research to those I was chatting with. A number of delegates responded by richly describing their own writing practices. Often they seemed grateful for the opportunity to have a willing listener who was keen to hear about the micro-detail of academic writing, its
preparations and rituals, its daily practices. This is not to say that all, or indeed any, of the characters represented in the poem actually described writing in these ways. Some details in the poem emerged from the conversations (salsa music, silence, writing in cafes) but much of the poem was made in the bounce between this detail and my imagination.

Across the three poems I appear as a neophyte who is learning about the academic work and life, both as an object of his study, and also a passionate practice. The poems foreground the uneasy relationship research poetry, and other evocative genres, have with neoliberal universities. As Fitzpatrick and Fitzpatrick (2015) argue, critical writers are often multiply placed, working ‘against, while within, neoliberal frameworks’ (p. 56). For example, by publishing poems and ethnographic fiction, I can be seen to perform a form of writing that is outside the dominant discourse of the neoliberal university, ‘an artistic expression that mocks the neoliberal’ (p. 56). Yet at the same time, publishing these accounts can also be viewed as participating within the dominant discourse by enacting a careerist subjectivity, and improving my ‘metrics’. Clearly, the craft of academic evocative writing cannot be wholly separated from the demands of working and studying in the neoliberal university, just as I, the doctoral student who is writing about doctoral education, cannot separate myself from the regulations that govern what is and is not acceptably ‘doctoral’. But, importantly, neither can writing’s pleasure or mystery be totally reduced to these neoliberal imperatives.

**Evocative genres & autoethnography ≠ ‘queer’?**
In the final section of this chapter, I return to one of the key concerns that has animated my thesis: how might queer concepts be ‘palpated’ (Rasmussen & Allen, 2014, p. 434) in higher education research? In particular, I am interested to consider how queer concepts might be placed in conversation with the evocative methodologies I have experimented with here. While I remain broadly comfortable with my earlier argument that ‘genre-bending’ (Richardson, 1997, p. 70) approaches can ‘enable researchers to differently attend to, represent, and evoke the ethnographic textures of university life’ (Burford, 2014b, p. 1233), including its affects, I experience a higher degree of doubt that such genres are, by virtue of their affinities and commitments, queer.

The question of ‘queer autoethnography’ has been helpfully considered by Tony Adams and Stacy Holman Jones in a number of different contributions over recent years (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008, 2011; Holman Jones & Adams, 2010a, 2010b). Across their work, Adams and Holman Jones describe themselves as ‘hinging’ together autoethnography and queer theory, as method and paradigm. Introducing their 2010a piece, the authors offer an ‘inventory’ of reasons for why autoethnography is a queer method: (1) autoethnographers disrupt research orthodoxies, in ways that are similar to the queer impetus to trouble the ‘normal’; (2) autoethnographers re-cast personal experience in tradition-breaking ways, which is similar to the ways queer theorists ‘(re)appropriate extant research, language, texts, practices and beliefs in novel, innovative ways’ (p. 141); (3) autoethographers consider representations of identity and experience uncertain and fluid, which is a sentiment that queer theorists share; and (4) autoethnographers make ‘ideological and discursive trouble while, simultaneously, work[ing] to create humane and equitable ways of living’ (p. 141), which, they argue, can be juxtaposed with queer theorists who
‘advocate for equitable political change and conceive of ways research, texts, and bodies can serve as sites of discursive “trouble”’ (p. 141). Across their pieces Holman Jones and Adams offer fine-grained and moving autoethnographic work which foregrounds the stories of two ‘LGBTQ’ identifying academics, and their negotiations of sexual identity, gender and intimacies. While Adams and Holman Jones offer how queer may work in a more radical and identity-oriented sense, I am interested in what other ways queer and autoethnography might be linked and conceptualised.

Building on the ideas of other queer theorists (Allen, 2015; Britzman, 1995b; Rasmussen & Allen, 2014), it is my proposition that autoethnographies by LGBT authors may not necessarily be ‘queer’ in the same way that incorporating LGBT people into marriage does not immediately make it a ‘queer’ or ‘queered’ social institution (Duggan, 2012). For writers who tend to view ‘queer’ as a theoretical, rather than sexual orientation, it is the reproduction of normalization itself that is a ‘problem of culture and of thought’ (Britzman, 1995b, p. 154; see also Allen, 2011, 2015; Gowlett & Rasmussen, 2014; Tierney & Dilley, 1998). This way of knowing queer might be set in contrast with Holman Jones and Adams’ work, which tends to fold together concept and identity category, for example, ‘My experience is queer theory and queer theory is me’ (Holman Jones & Adams, 2010a, p. 136). Another disjuncture between these different ways of thinking ‘queer’ is visible with regard to political intentionality. Where Holman Jones and Adams associate queer with critical activist modes of political organising that articulate a pathway for ‘equitable political change’ (Holman Jones & Adams, 2010a, p. 141), writers such as Allen (2011) have argued that the political in queer theory may not ‘amount to a cataclysmic revelation or a positive change; it might
simply amount to the unpredictable potential of thinking about something (like gender) differently’ (p. 161).

Perhaps the most significant difference between my own view of queer autoethnography and that advanced by Adams and Holman Jones’ is philosophical. In stating that ‘autoethnography is queer’ (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008), the authors have much greater certainty about what queer is in a way that is antithetical to other forms of queer theorising (Allen, 2015; Allen & Rasmussen, 2015; Kelemen and Rumens 2008; Rasmussen & Gowlett, 2015). If, as Browne and Nash argue, queer is a concept that refuses to be ‘bounded, controlled or defined’ (2010, p. 9), and instead demarcates ‘a positionality vis-à-vis the normative’ (Halperin, 1995, p. 62), it is not possible, in any permanent way, to ‘hinge’ the two concepts with an ‘is’. This is because, if queer theory must contest the logics of normativity, then its proponents will also need to hold open a curiosity about the normative logics that ‘alternative’ genres themselves enact. As Dilley (1999) observes:

with each new person that utilizes it, each new researcher who finds innovative application of it in her work, those words, boundaries, and understandings change, just as what is queer changes as the abnormal becomes known, understood, and accepted (p. 470).

Holman Jones and Adams’ question, then, could be reoriented from one of definition, what queer is and what it ain’t; instead, the question might be one of deployment, what queer does, and does not do (Allen, 2015). Their argument could, then, be reframed to ask how autoethnography can perform acts of ‘queering’; how in certain contexts autoethnographies might do queer things.
It is with queer’s potential to ‘do’ in mind that I’d like to more closely examine the first point of Adams and Holman Jones’ ‘inventory,’ and one of their most valuable arguments for the purposes of this thesis. That is, the possibility that autoethnography – through its form and style – might have a queering effect on research orthodoxies. How may this be the case? Well, if queer is a ‘sensibility’ that can assist researchers to understand the workings of heteronormativity in relation to sexuality and gender, it is possible that such a logic may also be ‘palpated’ (Rasmussen & Allen, 2014, p. 434) in the context of working with evocative methods. That is, evocative methods might be looked to for their potential to queerly interrogate, and disrupt, conventional modes of scholarly representation.

Research work on rhetorical genre theory (Paré, Starke-Meyerring & McAlpine, 2011; Starke-Meyerring, Paré, Sun & El-Bezre, 2014) has argued that repeated textual practices arise in collectives, such as disciplines or institutions, ‘because they produce material, intellectual, ideological and/or relational outcomes valued by the collective or a sub-group within the collective’ (p. 220). At their core, these generic practices encourage a level of standardisation across their texts which, ‘over time, exhibit similar patterns in linguistic, lexical, structural, topical and intentional features’ (Paré, Starke-Meyerring & McAlpine, 2011, p. 220). As Paré (2002) notes, academic genres produce a process of normalisation, which makes certain ways of representing knowledge ‘appear normal, even inevitable; they are simply the way things are done. And their status as historical practice within institutions or disciplines makes them appear immutable and certainly beyond the influence of the transitory individuals who participate in them’ (p. 59). These ‘habitual practices, norms and conventions’ have a regulatory effect on what ‘can
and cannot be said, thought and known’ (Starke-Meyerring, 2011, p. 78, see also Paré, Starke-Meyerring & McAlpine, 2011)\(^{31}\).

By inverting the ‘normal’ generic practices of academic writing in higher education, in my case by writing evocatively, we might open queer potential. This is a deployment of ‘queer’ similar to that sketched by Warner (2004), where he states queerness:

> means misperforming in such a way that the ‘natural’ assumptions are called into question; mixing and matching in ways that are not allowed and not called for; living (and researching) as a series of nonsequiturs which highlight that the supposed ‘natural’ relations in the matrix are merely constructions (p. 325)

By mixing ‘academic’ work with evocation and artistry, autoethnographic writing – like poetry and ethnographic fiction – might misperform in some queerly productive ways. Such misperformances can help to highlight the borders of intelligibility that have been erected around identifiable ‘academic’ work, in particular disciplinary contexts like higher education studies. Through their generic inversion, these texts might assist us to foreground the regulatory practices of academic representation, the way conventional prose repeatedly layers upon itself, and in so doing renders itself normal and constitutes other modes of representation unintelligible as ‘academic’. Evocative genres ‘throw light’ (Gowlett & Rasmussen, 2014, p. 334) onto the ‘seemingly neutral practices’ of conventional writing, and ‘create a discomfort about them’ (p. 334) by reminding us that standard academic prose is also a literary technique.

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\(^{31}\) For a more extensive consideration of what academic genres may regularise, see Starke-Meyerring, 2011, p. 79).
By estranging ourselves from higher education studies’ norms of writing, researchers can also proliferate further possibilities for writing outside of the norm. This is a possibility I gestured to in the introduction of this chapter with a quote by Glesne (1997):

Experimental form is an opening, a clearing in the woods of research regularities. The clearing away of accustomed practices releases a rare feeling of reflective play in interpretation and language.... The clearing ruptures traditional patterns of scientific knowing and notions of research purposes

It is also an argument I have developed further in my (2014) reflection on poetic writing as an approach to doctoral affect. There, I argued that poetic writing practices have the potential to challenge researchers of all disciplines to unhinge ourselves from the normative logics which reproduce academic-writing-as-usual. Poetry might assist us to prise open other ways of knowing and doing academic writing.

This sentiment is echoed by Fitzpatrick and Fitzpatrick (2015) in their reflection on poetry, which they describe as ‘a “risky” and “strange” mode of communication (not strange per se but unusual within the “normal” modes of supervisory conversations)’ (p. 56). They go on to say that this strangeness allowed something else to happen: ‘we said different things in different ways and we used an emotional tone to express the ideas’ (2015, p. 56).

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have sought to accomplish two primary objectives. The first was to explore how two evocative writing methodologies might differently attend to and represent the ‘affective landscapes’ (Nöbauer, 2012) of doctoral education in
the present. The second objective was to consider how evocative genres could queer(y) distinctions between the academic and the evocative. Having undertaken these ‘writing experiments’, I am persuaded that such genres of academic writing can be used to expand the representational toolkit for higher education researchers. For those of us interested in the thickness of ordinary life, ‘including the dull feelings of just getting by’ (Cvetkovich, 2012b, p. 159) as well as the ‘magic and mystery’ (Cvetkovich, 2012b, p. 11), these methods seem to offer rich possibilities. I hope that these experiments, set as they are amid a growing pool of alternative approaches to researching higher education, inspire further attempts to experiment and play with representing doctoral worlds.
FIGURE 3. Timo’s picture of ‘real’ writing experience
As I argued in the introductory chapter of this thesis, doctoral education is a rapidly transforming, and increasingly uneasy area. In this interlude, and the two chapters that follow (Chapters 3 and 4) I take an intimate look at one of doctoral education’s most uneasy practices: writing. This interlude is an insert into the chronological flow of the analytic chapters. Its purpose is to introduce a number of significant debates in the doctoral writing literature in order to contextualise the queer work that the next two chapters will undertake. This interlude begins by extending the work of the introductory chapter through an analysis of the impacts that recent transformations to doctoral education have had on the practice of writing. I track growing concern about attrition rates, times to completion as well as intensified expectations of the ‘quality’ and quantity of written artefacts. Next, I survey and position my thesis in relation to key debates in the doctoral writing research literature, differentiating between ‘study skills’ based approaches, and those which tend to view doctoral writing as a social and embodied practice. I conclude by characterising existing research on affective-politics, writing and academic workers, and explain how this material will be extended in the two chapters that follow.

The impacts of change on doctoral writing practice
As I argued in Chapter 1, the doctorate is increasingly framed as a high-stakes enterprise, with implications for the innovation and economic success of the nation. It is within this context that doctoral writing has crystallised as an object of concern. Increasingly, governments and institutions alike have begun to identify writing as ‘a key location for the collapse of high-level scholarly achievement’ (Lee & Aitchison, 2009, p. 93). There are two primary areas of consternation that have driven debate around doctoral writing. The first clusters around attrition rates (Bair & Haworth, 2005; Taylor & Beasley, 2005, p. 12), and times to submission (Bair & Haworth, 2005; Ehrenberg, Jakubson, Groen, So, & Price, 2007; Styles & Radloff, 2000; Tennant, 2010). These concerns are founded on the argument that doctoral students who do not finish within a given timeframe may be less employable outside of academia, and by failing to complete, or taking ‘too long’ to graduate, they are said to ‘waste’ not only their own time but also national educational funding (Taylor & Beasley, 2005, p. 12).

Such concerns are reflected in the NZ context via the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF), a competitive system for allocating research funding to HEIs. The PBRF comprises three components that are used by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) to determine an institution’s research funding level, one of which is the number of research degree completions (RDCs). The introduction of a funding system based upon RDCs has been a significant movement in NZ doctoral policy marking a transition away from a ‘head count’ funding model (Sampson & Comer, 2010). In addition to only funding doctoral students who complete their degrees\(^\text{32}\), the amount is capped to a set period of

\(^{32}\text{In addition to the government funding paid to universities on degree completion, the other key source of funding for the doctorate in NZ comes from students themselves in the form of annual}\)
three years of full-time equivalent doctoral study. Clearly then, there is a financial incentive for institutions to ensure that their doctoral students complete their degrees, and that they do this ‘on time’. Arguably, this has seen institutions become ‘relentlessly’ attentive to the productivity of their students (Hopwood, Alexander, Harris-Huemmert, McAlpine, & Wagstaff, 2011, p. 228), drawing upon managerial practices of surveillance in forming responses to the ‘problem’ of timeliness and completion. In order to address the doctoral writing ‘problem space’ (Starke-Meyerring, Paré, Sun & El-Bezre, 2014) many universities have instituted mechanisms such as confirmation of candidature, standard timelines for research milestones, annual reporting for supervisors and doctoral students (Bansel, 2011; Cribb & Gewirtz, 2006), financial incentives for timely completion, as well as the incorporation of on-time completion rates in academic workload agreements and research performativity measures (Bansel, 2011). These reforms have been criticised for imposing arbitrary timeframes which can encourage safe projects and an ‘aversion to risk taking and creativity’ (Hopwood et al., 2011, p. 228), as well as ‘under-theorised doctoral theses’ (J. White, 2013, p. 192).

The pressure to ensure on-time completion of the doctorate has also expressed itself in a key doctoral writing pedagogy: supervision. Green and Usher (2003) have argued that the emphasis on timeliness has inaugurated pedagogies of ‘fast supervision’, which put pressure on supervisors to encourage their students to:

- formulate their research questions from the outset,
- satisfy demands for research proposal hurdles on time,
- collect data in ways free of unexpected impediments, and
- write (or produce a given artefact) without hesitation.

Such tasks, and others along the research degree journey, must be

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domestic fees. At the time of writing the fee for doctoral study at Auckland University was over $6500 (NZ) per year.
undertaken at the very least in no more than the maximum time frame allowed (p. 44).

‘Fast supervision’ may be part of what Cribb and Gewirtz (2006) describe as a more machinelike pedagogy, where supervisors are oriented toward ‘processing’ PhD theses (p. 228) rather than assisting in the development of doctoral scholars. The impact of managerial forms of governance has seen the development of a more ‘punitive climate characterised by threats and sanctions…to which supervisors are party whether they want to be or not’ (Cribb & Gewirtz, 2006, p. 227). Indeed, supervisors may also be targets, having been ‘brought under the panoptic gaze of the institution through the progress monitoring machinery of form filling and review meetings’ (Cribb & Gewirtz, 2006, p. 228, see also Davies, 2006).

At the same time as the expectation for a ‘timely finish’ has risen to greater importance, doctoral writing has also become a more intensified practice. Doctoral students are under pressure to write and publish an increasingly diverse array of texts (see Aitchison, Kamler, & Lee, 2010; Aitchison & Mowbray, 2015; Kamler, 2008; Marchant, Anastasi, & Miller, 2011; McGrail, Rickard, & Jones, 2006). Doctoral students’ written texts are also now expected to have a higher ‘impact’, with publication prior to graduation a growing requirement (Maher et al., 2008; Prasad, 2013). But students are increasingly called to produce other forms of writing too: reports in partnership with the business sector, conference papers, peer reviews, funding applications, social media posts, as well as reporting back on these activities as a part of an expanded set of accountability measures (see Badenhorst & Guerin, 2016; Paré, Starke-Meyering & McAlpine, 2011). Some of this added pressure on writing has been mandated directly by institutions, which are ‘increasingly dependent on written doctoral
outputs in order to attract government funding and industry grants to build their reputation’ (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2015, p. 288). Indeed, an increasing number of Asian HEIs now require students to publish peer-reviewed articles in English for a doctorate to be conferred at all (Li, 2015). This can leave students in a kind of limbo for years after they have had their thesis examined as they wait for a publication to be accepted in an appropriately ranked journal. Other pressures are indirect, implications of a competitive academic job market where CVs ought to be replete with writing-related outputs. For today’s doctoral students then, there is increased pressure to finish the doctorate as well as to meet heightened expectations of quantity and ‘impact’ regarding its written outputs. These features add up to an overall picture of doctoral writing as a practice that has been unsettled by increased regulation, intensified responsibility, and growing surveillance.

**Exploring doctoral writing research**

With the growth of its public and policy profile, doctoral education research has also undergone a recent expansion. According to Hopwood and colleagues (2011), the historical scarcity of research on the doctorate may be explained by widely held uncertainty as to whether it ought to be considered ‘education’ at all. However, recognition of the doctorate as a site of teaching and learning (Connell, 1985), and increased attention from policy-makers, institutions and practitioners, has prompted a swift growth of projects (Boud & Lee, 2009b; Carter, 2011; Hopwood & Paulson, 2012; Kamler & Thomson, 2014; Lee, Brennan, & Green, 2009; Lee & Kamler, 2008; Maunula, 2015; McAlpine & Amundsen, 2012). In spite of the recent attention, many features of this complex practice remain relatively

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33 For further information on the increasing pressure to publish in English, see Lillis & Curry, 2006.
unexplored, including the practice of writing. Various authors have characterised the marginal space doctoral writing occupies in the field. For Kamler & Thomson (2014), doctoral writing is ‘something that everybody is worried about, but about which there was too little systematic debate and discussion’ (p. vii). Lee & Aitchison (2009) also see doctoral writing as under-researched, describing an ‘almost deafening silence’ (p. 90), a description echoed by Simpson and Humphrey (2010), who position writing as an ‘area of opacity’ (p. 70). Many explanations have been offered as to why the practice of writing remains overlooked in dominant discourses of postgraduate education, but a broad consensus amongst doctoral education researchers is that it tends to be understood as ‘ancillary or marginal to the real work of research’ (Kamler & Thomson, 2014, p. 2).

Broadly speaking, there are two discernible research communities in the doctoral writing literature: study skills-based approaches (Lea & Street, 1998, Lillis & Curry, 2006) and researchers who view doctoral writing as a discursive, social, and embodied practice (Barnacle & Dall’Alba, 2014; Bosanquet & Cahir, 2015; Hopwood & Paulson, 2012; Kamler, 2008; Kamler & Thomson, 2006, 2008, 2014; Lee & Aitchison, 2009, Starke-Meyerring, 2011). The first category is the most prevalent, and can be seen across the popular writing guidebook genre. These projects tend to frame writing as a skill that is possessed (or not) by the individual doctoral student. Writing tends to be framed as universal, something ‘that doctoral students should simply have – perhaps learned once and for all in high school or in their undergraduate or master’s programs’ (Starke-Meyerring, 2011, p. 82). Within these accounts writing tends to be understood straightforwardly, as a set of portable generic techniques for spelling, punctuation, grammar, structuring the thesis and developing work habits. Any
perceived writing ‘problems’ tend to be interpreted as deficits, and something that the individual student ought to fix. Given the focus of study skills research, the primary approaches used are instrumental or evaluative. That is, research tends to focus on either providing ‘how to’ strategies, or measuring the effectiveness of such strategies. A characteristic assumption of these studies is that researchers and practitioners can ascertain and predict ‘what works’ to promote effective doctoral writing, and then apply this broadly across contexts. The effect of this kind of work is to constitute doctoral writing as ‘mechanical’ and ‘predictable’, thus making the process appear to be a relatively straightforward enterprise (White, 2013). In explaining why study skills approaches tend to find favour at an institutional level, Badenhorst and colleagues (2015) argue that it is simply much easier to offer such interventions: ‘add-on writing skills courses, once-off thesis-writing workshops, and the odd how-to programme are attractive options for university administrators who are operating within managerialist approaches to learning and see these as the answer to quicker completion rates in graduate research’ (p. 2). This analysis is extended by Aitchison and Mowbray (2015), who suggest that writing is often perceived ‘in its narrowest sense – as an output with revenue-raising potential and as a reputation-building value’ (p. 288). Doctoral writing, then, becomes understood as a countable output, which in turn ‘justifies a limited and very particular kind of provision for developing writing expertise; that is, it prescribes a product focussed curriculum favouring the teaching of textual structure and form’ (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2015, p. 289).

However, there are a growing number of scholars who have criticised the ‘study skills’ paradigm, arguing these approaches reduce the complexity of writing by viewing it as merely ‘a set of arbitrary rules and matters of etiquette’ (Kamler &
Thomson, 2014, p. 6). The tendency for study skills approaches to identify individuals who don’t ‘get it’ or don’t ‘have it’ (Kamler & Thomson, 2014, p. 4) has also been identified as a deficit discourse (Badenhorst, Moloney, Rosales, Dyer & Ru, 2015; Haggis, 2006) that works to displace the collective responsibility of institutions. In contrast, recent critical work has focused on doctoral writing from an academic literacies perspective (Badenhorst, Moloney, Rosales, Dyer & Ru, 2015; Lillis & Curry, 2006, Lillis & Scott, 2007). Rather than placing the ‘deficit’ with the student, this approach draws attention to the areas of the doctoral curriculum that create barriers to student success (Badenhorst, Moloney, Rosales, Dyer & Ru, 2015; Lillis & Scott, 2007). Academic literacies researchers also critically explore the tendency to associate certain groups of learners with individual writing deficit. In particular, the ‘new’ students, who have arrived to university through efforts at widening participation (and may be ‘mature’, ‘disadvantaged’, ‘non-traditional’, ‘part-time’ or ‘international’), are often positioned as the doctoral bodies who are bringing the ‘writing problem’ (Badenhorst, Moloney, Rosales, Dyer & Ru, 2015. p. 3; Haggis, 2006). Whereas study skills approaches tend to see writing as an ‘individual, neutral, cognitive issue’ (Badenhorst, Moloney, Rosales, Dyer & Ru, 2015, p. 2), academic literacy approaches take doctoral writing as a complex ‘social action’ (Kamler & Thomson, 2014, p. 6) that is embedded in relations of power, and grounded in disciplinary epistemic practices (Starke-Meyerring, 2011). Such approaches have claimed that acquiring doctoral writing literacies is a ‘process of development over time...through gradually increasing and mentored participation in the discursive practices that constitute the work of the research culture’ (Starke-Meyerring, 2011, p. 81). This means that pedagogical approaches that seek to address doctoral writing ought to go beyond simply giving ‘advice and tips’ (Kamler & Thomson, 2014, p. 13), and must instead be understood as a ‘socially
constructed communicative or rhetorical event shaped by power relations and with personal and social consequences’ (Lee & Aitchison, 2009, p. 91). The implication of this critique is that notions of doctoral writing as an individual skill alone are too shallow. What is required is a re-framing of doctoral writing as a ‘culturally specific knowledge-making practice’ (Starke-Meyerring, 2011, p. 85) where students learn ‘what knowledge is valued, what questions can be asked and who is allowed to ask while at the same time learning what they know and how to write what they know’ (Badenhorst, Moloney, Rosales, Dyer & Ru, 2015, p. 2). This understanding calls for slower, ‘embedded writing pedagogies that allow graduate students to negotiate academic literacies over time’ (Badenhorst, Moloney, Rosales, Dyer & Ru, 2015, p. 2).

The affective-political dimensions of doctoral writing

In this thesis, I build on research that takes doctoral writing as a complex social practice. However, to some extent this thesis charts an unusual path. Whereas other scholars have paid particular attention to genre (Starke-Meyerring, 2011) or identity (Paré, Starke-Meyerring & McAlpine, 2011), I focus on the affective and political dimensions of doctoral writing. While some work exploring the emotions associated with developing an academic writing identity has emerged, a focus on writing as a felt experience remains under-considered in the existing doctoral writing literature (for exceptions see: Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Badenhorst & Guerin, 2016; Bosanquet & Cahir, 2015; Cameron, Nairn & Higgins, 2009; Kamler & Thomson, 2014). The absence of research focussed on the affective dimensions of writing fits within a more general pattern which sees affect marginalised in higher education research. Within doctoral education in particular, I think the limited consideration of emotion has something to do with the habitual framing
of ‘writing up’ the doctorate as a linear and relatively mechanical process that happens toward the end of the thesis (Badenhorst & Guerin, 2016; Kamler & Thomson, 2014; McAlpine & Amundsen, 2012), as well as the institutional preference for less expensive and time-intensive interventions into writing (Badenhorst et al., 2015). In this thesis I position doctoral writing otherwise, recognising it as a practice that many students carry ‘deep in their psyche, bones and muscles’ (Kamler & Thomson, 2014, p. 3).

I also pay close attention to the politics of doctoral education, and the role that writing plays in the intensified environment of the managerial university. This is a question addressed by Elizabeth and Grant (2013), writing about academic work. As Elizabeth and Grant note, within the managerial context, ‘audit practices privilege the writing and publishing (in contrast to the teaching, serving, or even researching) version of the academic self’ (2013, p. 124). As a result the productivity of researchers, particularly with regard to their ‘outputs’, has become increasingly important. Writing increasingly counts for individual academics with regard to promotion, and job retention (Sparkes, 2007), as well as for institutions in pursuit of public funding. The uneasy role of writing in the current higher education environment has prompted a number of studies that seek to trace the particular affective figurations that have become associated with it (Burrows 2012; Gill 2010).

**Conclusion**

Whereas mainstream accounts of doctoral writing tend to frame it as a portable, decontextualised skill (Starke-Meyerring, 2011), I have argued the position of this thesis; that writing as a situated social practice (Badenhorst & Guerin, 2016),
which is affective and political. While researchers have explored recent transformations to the practice of doctoral writing (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2015; Lee & Aitchison, 2009), often this work has been motivated to develop pedagogies that support students to meet the new expectations that have arisen. At this point, there has been limited attention to what broad changes to the meanings and practices of doctoral education *feel* like for students. Unlike the accounts of academic labour I introduced (Burrows, 2012; Elizabeth & Grant, 2013; Gill, 2010; Sparkes, 2007), where there have been richer conceptualisations of writing-politics-feeling, the affective and political dimensions of doctoral writing remain undeveloped. I contribute toward addressing these gaps in the two chapters that follow. The next chapter, Chapter 3, revisits an earlier piece I wrote (Burford, 2014b; see Appendix F), and uses queer concepts (Jagose, 2010) to re-interpret the same empirical case about a doctoral student’s calm and ‘responsible’ management of her writing and emotional performance. This is followed by Chapter 4, which proposes that a queer reading of failure might offer opportunities to re-think the affective-political practice of doctoral writing. I examine data from one case to illustrate how a doctoral student negotiates ‘failure’ in relation to their writing practice and identity. While higher education researchers have tended to interpret failure as something to avoid, or learn from in the pursuit of normative success, queer research on the ‘art of failure’ (Halberstam, 2011) can offer us new pathways into analysis.
FIGURE 4. Joel’s ‘My ideal/myself as a writer’
CHAPTER 3

QUEER(Y)ING THE AFFECTIVE-POLITICS OF DOCTORAL EDUCATION

Toward complex visions of agency and affect

This chapter closely examines research on the affective-politics of higher education. It is informed by the ‘affective turn’ that has occurred across the humanities and social sciences (Clough, 2007), and is currently rippling through higher education research. Even a passing glance at journals within the field reveals multiple engagements: from particular examinations of depression (Cvetkovich, 2012b; Khawaja, Santos, Habibi, & Smith, 2013), stress (Shin & Jung, 2014) and anxiety (MacKenzie et al., 2010), to the use of emotions to measure higher education satisfaction (C. White, 2013), emotional well-being in the higher education workplace (Woods, 2010) and the affective landscape of social inequality in higher education (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Hey, 2013; Leathwood & Hey, 2009; Lynch, 2010; Nordmarken, 2014; Rodriguez & Boahene, 2012; Taylor, 2013).

While it is clear that the emotional context of university work and life is an increasingly popular object of inquiry, a focus on the politics of affect in higher education remains a minority interest. Much higher education research proceeds on the assumption that emotions are psychological states that arise in the inner worlds of individuals. In keeping with long-standing academic values, which

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34 This chapter builds on an earlier article published in Higher Education Research & Development, 34(4), 776-787.
disassociate what is properly academic (reason/thinking) from passions, emotions and the body (Hopwood & Paulson, 2012; Lynch, 2010; Mortiboys, 2002; Peseta, 2001), the conventional focus remains on particular emotions as ‘problems’ to be overcome for ‘effective’ teaching, learning and research to occur.

In contrast, higher education research on the politics of affect describes and interprets emotions as in social circulation, seeing them as embodied, relational, cultural and economic phenomena – and, therefore, valuable resources for political analysis. My attention in this chapter is fixed on research that takes as its object the affective scene of university work and life (Burrows, 2012; Gill, 2010; Grant & Elizabeth, 2014; Hey, 2011; Lynch, 2010; Nobauer, 2012; Pelias, 2004; Shaw, 2011; Sparkes, 2007). This research focus forms part of a much broader body of inquiry into the conditions of living, working and studying in the contemporary university. Researchers of higher education, bloggers and journalists have all identified the ‘changing spirit’ of the neoliberalised university (Elizabeth & Grant, 2013). It has been variously characterised as immersed in ‘rapid restructuring’ (Nobauer, 2012), ‘turmoil’ (Fitzgerald, 2012) and ‘crisis’ (Grant, Burford, Bosanquet, & Loads, 2014). Among the drivers of these changes, processes such as managerialism and performativity regimes have been singled out for their particularly deleterious effects (Davies & Petersen, 2005b).

Of great importance for this chapter is the broad consensus that appears to be emerging about the affective consequences of these transformations. Writing from the UK, Burrows (2012) describes the present academic moment as one of ‘deep, affective, somatic crisis’ that ‘threatens to overwhelm us’ (p. 355). He references Gill’s (2010) examination of the new ‘ordinary and everyday’ affects of the contemporary university: ‘exhaustion, stress, overload, insomnia, anxiety,
shame, aggression, hurt, guilt and feelings of out-of-placeness, fraudulence and fear of exposure’ (p. 229). According to Gill (2010), this ‘toxic’ mix of affects can be attributed to the increasing ‘precariousness’ of academic life (p. 230) – particularly for ‘early career’ academics. This is a claim that I (Burford, 2014a), and others (Prasad, 2013) have extended to encompass doctoral students as well. Common features of precarious academic labour include an increase of temporary contract jobs, anxiety in finding and keeping work, poor pay, long hours, the muddying of boundaries between work and home, high levels of mobility, passionate attachments to work, and the identity of being an ‘academic’ (Gill, 2010). Gill argues that these eroded conditions of academic labour have had deep and worrying impacts on the present academic mood. Academics are, she argues, living on the edge of ‘breaking point’ (p. 235).

It would appear that the suite of affects Gill identifies is not confined to the UK alone. Writing from the USA, Pelias (2004) strikes much the same chord in his auto-ethnographic account of academic despondency and disillusionment. Similarly, in an ethnography of ‘external lecturers’ in Austrian universities, Nobauer (2012) describes the feelings of anxiety, despair and disappointment that increasingly accompany insecure academic work. Yet, it is Andrew Sparkes who has offered the most evocative account of the current tone of university life, with his ethnographic fiction on audit culture (2007). His story is set in the present, in the fictional University of Wannabee Academic (UWA). The protagonist, Jim, is the Director of Research for the School of Performance Studies. As the story unfolds, we witness the growing disillusionment he experiences, and its consequences; Jim seems barely able to retain a grip on his academic work and life. The waves of disillusionment that wash over him are attributed to the way that neoliberal discourse, with its mantra of ‘research
grants in – publications out’, has colonised university life. In one scene we observe Jim performing his positional duty by informing a junior colleague, Alan, that his publication record makes him ‘vulnerable’ and ‘at risk’ in an upcoming research evaluation exercise (p. 524). Clearly hurt, Alan replies ‘You made me feel like shit. You really did. You made me feel like my research didn’t count. That I didn’t count’ (p. 524). As the scene plays out it becomes clear that Jim had good intentions, but if academic writing outputs have come to represent the value and worth of academic workers, then it is no wonder that the criticism feels personal. While in Alan’s case public anger is part of the affective performance, often ‘feeling like shit’ is experienced as individual and private, and gives rise to feelings of shame. This affective performance is evident later in the story where Jim meets a close colleague, Paul, who has just lost his job as a result of a university research assessment. Paul’s words are telling, ‘They say my history here doesn’t count for anything. They now say my research is not good enough. Not the right quality. Just not good enough…I’m not good enough’. Here the feeling of being ‘not good enough’ sticks to not only Paul’s writing output but his body. Sparkes informs us that Paul’s is a ‘body in pain, wracked with pain, immobilised with pain, broken through pain’ (p. 530). These stresses, coupled with his own attempts at self-medication, contribute to Jim experiencing an emotional breakdown at the end of the story, whereupon he approaches shoppers, passers-by and eventually his own reflection in a shop window to ask: ‘Guess who I’m not?’ Regardless of the response, Jim repeatedly answers his own question: ‘I’m not Bob Geldof that’s who I’m not. And I’m not my CV either’ (p. 535).

This new ‘mantra’ that Jim is unable to contain paints a stark picture of the academic present. Jim is caught between the rock of realising he is not the
change-agent he hoped he might be, and the hard place of eking out an academic existence where selves have become CVs. The nervous breakdown he experiences in the story clearly reverberates with accounts of a growing, and ‘overwhelming’, affective crisis in higher education (Burrows, 2012).

While much of the focus has been on academics, it is my argument that this research agenda can be usefully extended to analyse the contemporary scene of doctoral education also. While there are a number of differences between academic and doctoral student practices and identities, I have illustrated (Burford, 2014a) that there are broad convergences in terms of the precarious environment increasingly shared by both. Like academics, doctoral students have become progressively subject to neoliberal discourse, which has transformed the meanings and practices of doctoral education (Bansel, 2011; Deuchar, 2008). There has been a growth in measures of performativity such as progress targets, fixed completion times, and increasing pressures to publish, at the same time as reductions to funding and support (Associated Press NZ, 2013). We must also remember that many doctoral students study with the anticipation of academic futures, at the same time as newspaper articles announce the fraying of this very possibility, given ‘armies’ of students competing for jobs (The Economist, 2010). There is something of a shared affective sensorium between academics and doctoral students and, as a consequence, there is much to be learned from reading accounts of the affective-politics of academic and doctoral life together.

In summary, I have argued that political readings of higher education have identified the depressed affective scene that surrounds academic work and doctoral study. In the section that follows I explore a much more vexed question:
that of the relationship between particular affective practices (Wetherell, 2012), and their orientation toward agency. I trace existing patterns of thinking about this question in higher education research, noting that scholars have tended to rely on certain assumptions about the relationship between affect and the political.

**Conceptualising resistance and affective agency in higher education**

As I have outlined above, discussions about the feelings associated with the current scene of academic labour have been increasingly pursued in the higher education literature. Repeatedly, scholars have asserted that the present circumstances demand political action (Burrows, 2012; Davies, 2005; Gill, 2010; Thatcher, 2012). Yet when it comes to formulating a response, many agree that there is something of a vacuum. Increasingly, researchers have turned to examine emotion and affect in order to understand why this may be the case. On the one hand, Burrows (2012) has suggested that forms of ‘quantified control’ can ‘tempt’ academics into a state of ‘depressive complicity’ (p. 356) and, on the other, Gill (2010) notes the ‘divisive individualising practices’ generated through neoliberal discourse (p. 241). Not only are academics ‘tempted’ in, and ‘divided’ out, the prevailing affective formations of exhaustion, and precariousness have a dampening effect on capacities for political transformation.

The question of what emotions do (Ahmed, 2004) within higher education has also been considered by Grant and Elizabeth (2014). They have explored why academic women in NZ have not collectively opposed the negative impacts of the national research performativity regime, the PBRF. Grant and Elizabeth (2014) suggest that the absence of collective action may be connected to ‘diverse
personal histories, disciplinary locations and other axes of difference’ (p. 11), which create a complex set of power relations between individual women and research audit. Furthermore, by reading across the emotions present in interview material, the authors observe that feelings frequently associated with collective political resistance, such as anger, fear and frustration, were largely missing from the accounts women gave. The absence of these feelings, the authors argue, makes it more challenging to prompt and sustain ‘forms of active resistance towards research audit’s threat’ (p. 1). Additionally, Grant and Elizabeth (2014) speculate whether the ‘distinctive fiendishness’ (p. 12) of performativity regimes may be that they generate anxiety, which is more likely to produce insomnia and limit the capacity to think (Summers-Bremner, 2006) than create space for political agency.

Grant and Elizabeth’s suspicion about anxiety, and their identification of the missing feelings of anger, fear and frustration, resonates with critical traditions of political analysis, which have tended to cast a hopeful glance toward ‘strong’ emotions, with the expectation that they might spark political engagement. This pattern of thinking about feelings appears to thread across the higher education research I have surveyed, including my own previous contribution (Burford, 2014a). Those looking to intervene in the depressed scene of higher education have often called for radical responses such as collective action (Gill, 2010; Pereira, 2016), unionisation (Thatcher, 2012) and protest (Gill, 2010) – political responses that seem unlikely to be animated by feelings such as anxiety, despair, dread or disinterest.

Later in their article, Grant and Elizabeth (2014) complicate this picture. While some ‘weak’ affects such as compliance and resignation may be habitually
written off as passive and apolitical, the authors point out that they might also be seen as strategies of survival amidst a situation where pathways of resistance are unclear (p. 8). Grant and Elizabeth’s (2014) characterisation of emotions as politically unpredictable forms a helpful launching point for this chapter. My concern is to examine alternative ways of understanding ‘weak’ affects, and the wider questions this poses for re-imagining the relationship between affect and the political in higher education. In order to accomplish this task, I return to a case I have considered previously (Burford, 2014a)³⁵, where I took a somewhat pessimistic view of a doctoral student’s self-management of her anxious affects. The remainder of this chapter proceeds with an introduction to the case study, and my deployment of a ‘queer(y)ing methodology’ (Gowlett, 2014) in order to consider it anew. In my re-reading of the case, I will apply the insights of emerging debates on queered and complex agency (Jagose, 2010). I suggest that queer theoretical approaches to agency and affect can trouble common-sense conceptions, which form a kind of ‘affective determinism’ (McManus, 2011) in higher education research. Furthermore, I will argue that politically depressed affective practices such as ‘keeping calm and carrying on’ in anxious times may in fact open onto counterintuitive, and complex, modes of agency that are currently unexplored, maybe even unthinkable, within higher education research.

The first reading: ‘Managing’ to keep calm and carry on writing

As I have already explained, this chapter is an attempt to offer a second, alternative theoretical reading of an empirical case I have previously interpreted. While I have already gestured to the space in the higher education literature that

³⁵ See Appendix F.
gave rise to this re-consideration, I will admit some other concerns which prompted my interest. One reason I decided to return to an earlier account is that it enables me to explore how different theoretically inflected readings of data can animate different kinds of affective subjects and social worlds. The practice of reading the same material against divergent theoretical framings is one that has been explored by Honan and colleagues (2000). In their article ‘Producing possible Hannahs’, the authors offered three alternative theoretical framings of an ethnographic case study of a 12-year-old girl. By juxtaposing these different lenses, the authors were able to illustrate the vast differences in the agency that the subject is imagined to exercise. This is the same kind of outcome that I am hoping to achieve by reconsidering the account of ‘Catherine’ – a participant in my study. Ultimately, readers will be able to compare and contrast the two analyses I offer. A second reason that I returned to Catherine’s account has something to do with the fact that I began to see my own approach to writing reverberating with it. Reflecting back, my own writing practice has, at times, involved similar strategies to those I identified in Catherine’s account. Recognising myself in Catherine’s text made it all the more challenging for me to accept my initial narrow reading of her agency – it caused me to question whether I would accept such a pessimistic reading of my own writing practice.

‘Catherine’, was a third-year PhD student in a Faculty of Education. She completed 14 diary entries over a two-month period, writing over 7500 words altogether. I selected two passages from her second and third writing diary entries to interpret (476 words combined) as I noticed a similar pattern seemed to be repeated in both entries. The first entry was made on a Monday. Catherine described her plan to ‘craft’ together sections of writing she had already completed for the methodology section of her thesis. She set herself a daily target
of 1000 words in order to finish writing her methodology chapter, as well as six other pieces of writing she had committed to. The second entry was made on the Thursday of the same week. Catherine noted that her writing had not gone as she had ‘optimistically planned’. She had not met her word count target, and had spent extra time in the evenings trying to catch up. She blamed herself for ‘wasting time’ and other bad habits she associated with her ‘way of writing’. In my initial interpretation of the two diary entries, I identified her as occupying the subject position of the writing manager. I observed the way Catherine repeatedly took up language and practices of ‘management’. Not only did she use the word ‘manage’ three times in the first entry, she also described a number of workload management strategies commonly suggested in doctoral advice texts and writing workshops, including chapter word counts, daily word targets and ‘to-do’ lists. I observed the moral value attached to the subject position of the writing manager; Catherine was able to mark herself as a disciplined and self-monitoring ‘good-student’ idealised by the neoliberal university (Grant, 1997).

Using Wetherell’s (2012) rubric of ‘affective practice’, I went beyond Catherine’s description of her writing routine to examine the texts for patterns of affect. I argued that Catherine repeatedly moved to not only manage her writing, but also to manage troubling emotions about her writing. I identified the affective subject position of the rational emotion manager. In naming this, I was only partially connecting to the thinking developed out of Hochschild’s (1983) work which examined (in)appropriate forms of emotional display during social interaction. The kind of emotion management I noticed in Catherine’s diary entries was different: it was an internal practice within her own private scene. We can observe this in the following passage from her diary:
I have seven things to write, including two chapters, four articles and a workshop. That makes me feel quite scared and so I then start to break these down into numbers of words and how much I can write in a given time and this makes me feel better, it feels more manageable broken down like this.

The underlined text at the beginning provides clues to the context of Catherine’s writing life. Clearly, Catherine is engulfed with writing responsibilities, and she reports that she feels afraid of the ‘daunting’ tasks ahead of her. But we also need to examine what Catherine did when anxious affects emerged. She ‘breaks’ things down ‘into numbers of words’ and ‘how much I can write in a given time’. I suggested that this breaking down was not only about numbers and words – it also appeared to be a form of breaking down feelings. Catherine ‘felt better’ once words, numbers and feelings were dismantled in this way. I went on to argue that Catherine’s affective performance of containing and managing negative feelings about writing might be seen to connect to the ‘Keep Calm and Carry On’ meme that is so emblematic in our current cultural milieu (Hughes, 2009). This quiet affective performance calls citizens to ‘carry on’ through crisis. The prevalence of this messaging on mugs, t-shirts and across social media makes sense in a time of on-going military conflict, economic recession and looming environmental collapse. I am suggesting that this same kind of practice may also be understandable amidst the on-going, and ordinary, ‘crisis’ environment generated by the contemporary university.

What might critical researchers of higher education make of Catherine’s case? The affective scene that emerges in her account looks familiar to that sketched by the scholars I introduced previously. In these diary entries, Catherine appears to be swamped by a host of writing responsibilities, which generate a significant
amount of stress and anxiety. She tries to manage these feelings by using practices of rational control, which make her ‘feel better’, and able to refocus on her work. Like Grant and Elizabeth’s (2014) study, the passages appear to lack ‘strong’ affects. Catherine’s emotional self-management in order to ‘keep calm, and carry on’ would not seem to be the kind of affective practice that might light a spark of resistance, and halt the spread of neoliberalism in the university. In my previous consideration of this case, I offered a similarly pessimistic reading (Burford, 2014a). I interpreted Catherine’s affective practice as a ‘symptom’ which emerged in response to a political situation, but did not consider that the practice itself promised much in the way of possibility. Rather than transforming the present context, I saw that keeping calm was more likely to orient energies toward its maintenance – and, therefore, perpetuate the conditions that generate such emotional suffering in the first place. I interpreted practices of calm self-management as complicit with the disciplining regime of neoliberal governance. By keeping calm and carrying on, Catherine appeared to prevent a ‘reality check’ on the sustainability of contemporary doctoral life, a reality check that might boil over into something ‘productive’ such as anger or frustration. I concluded my paper by questioning whether Catherine might not be better off moving to ‘mis-manage her writing and affect’ and suggested she might explore an alternative meme: ‘raise hell and change the world’ (Burford, 2014a). In this current chapter, however, I wish to revisit my initial interpretation, and offer a second reading. In the following section I introduce the ‘queer(y)ing methodology’ (Gowlett, 2015) that I will use to re-view Catherine’s case.

Reading anew: A queer/(y)ing methodology
By referring to queer theory, I am speaking about a community of scholarship that emerged around the early 1990s. It is commonly associated with the work of a number of thinkers, including Annamarie Jagose, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, José Esteban Muñoz and J. Jack Halberstam, among others. Its emergence and divergence from lesbian, gay and more recently bisexual and transgender (LGBT) studies is important to note. LGBT studies, with its methodology of identity politics, has focused on mobilising minority-rights discourse in order to advance social and institutional equality for LGBT subjects. This differs from queer critique, which orients toward ‘stirring up’ sedimented knowledge, by ‘throwing light on seemingly neutral practices and creating a discomfort about them’ (Gowlett & Rasmussen, 2014, p. 334).

In contrast to LGBT studies, queer critique might be called ‘subjectless’, in the sense that it does not suppose a ‘proper object’ for the field. As Halperin puts it:

> Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers ... ‘Queer’ then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative. (1995, p. 62)

What this means is that queer critique can be applied to any number of anti-normative projects. Despite the long-standing defence of this possibility, in practice education research continues to attach queer theory to sex, sexuality and gender (Allen, 2013; Gowlett, 2014, 2015; Rasmussen & Allen, 2014; Talburt & Rasmussen, 2010). Recently, Rasmussen and Allen (2014) have argued that queer theory should do more in education research. They have called for approaches that subvert the ‘tendency to corral queer theory’ within the ‘cul de sac of studies
of gender and sexuality’ (p. 2), and challenge researchers to use queer concepts in contexts ‘where, at first glance, they appear to have no place or purchase’ (p. 1).

This chapter on doctoral writing, and Gowlett’s study of senior subject selection (2014), are two emerging answers to this call. In my own case, the queer recognition of Catherine’s calm self-management as potentially agentic may interrupt normative logics of the political visibility of affective practice in higher education research.

‘Fake O’ and the complexities of agency

In order to queerly re-consider Catherine’s account, I have turned to Annamarie Jagose’s essay Counterfeit pleasures: fake orgasm and queer agency (2010), and her wider collection of work on the history of the orgasm (Jagose, 2012). Perhaps my decision to introduce material that examines simulated sexual climax will raise some eyebrows. What on earth does this teach us about doctoral writing, and its associated patterns of feeling? In framing my response, I do not wish to reject the possibility that a comparison of the two objects (orgasm and writing) might produce some critical reverberations. However, in this chapter, I am more interested in learning from the queer methodology that Jagose brings to the question of the legibility of agency. It is my view that this methodology can help us to understand not only erotic practices, but also the ‘affective practices’ (Wetherell, 2012) associated with doctoral writing, which are the concern of this chapter.

In her essay, Jagose examines the kinds of sexual ‘figures’ that queer theorists tend to invest with political agency. She observes the Foucauldian-inspired
methodology that sees a habitual reversal of normative sexual hierarchies in order to register the value of marginalised erotic practices. As Jagose notes, after Foucault, queer theorists have commonly looked to innovative practices of pleasure for their potential to subvert the disciplinary regime of sexuality. Jagose outlines the history of the ‘fist-fucker’ as queer theory’s figure par excellence, and introduces the assembled cast of ‘subaltern sexual protagonists – the cruisers, dyke bois, barebackers, and erotic vomiters ... ’ (2010, p. 519) that appear as privileged figures for the political. It is the way in which these figures are legible as political, and other erotic innovators – such as heterosexual women who fake orgasm – are not, that is the issue at the heart of Jagose’s essay. As she points out, rather than an innovation, fake orgasm is commonly interpreted as problematic within feminist, queer and left political analysis. In these accounts, fake orgasm is constituted as a docile practice of sexual subjection, which promises little of political consequence.

There are two things Jagose takes from this. Firstly, she suggests that researchers of sexuality might be more circumspect about the potentialities of subaltern sexual practices, rather than reifying them as necessarily radical and transformative. Secondly, she suggests that queer theorists might learn just as much from practices that are coded as quotidian, undramatic and conservative. Jagose’s key message is that the political is much more complex than we tend to think; it may not appear heroic or intentional, or even feel good – as she puts it: ‘The political is not always recognisable by dint of its upbeat and forward-looking mien’ (2010, p. 533).

In order to flesh out her re-conceptualisation of ‘agency’, Jagose turns to a theoretical archive on political feeling, which has focused on the downbeat
(Berlant, 2006) and backward-looking (Love, 2007). She closely considers Berlant’s (2006) work on political negativity, and gestures toward the way that politically depressed practices, like fake orgasm, may prompt us to reconsider what agency means in seemingly intractable contexts. We might, she argues, recognise the political as ‘a mode of engagement that does not necessarily transform its context’ (Jagose, 2010, p. 533). Not only future-focused and advancing, agency might also be a ‘return to some scene of deadening familiarity that might yet be done over differently, even if, more probably done over just the same’ (Jagose, 2010, p. 533). Jagose connects her thinking to Stewart’s (2007) vision of agency as something: ‘strange, twisted, caught up in things, passive or exhausted, not the way we like to think about it. Not usually a simple projection toward a future ... agency is frustrated and attracted to the potential in things’ (p. 86). In Jagose’s queer model, ‘agency’ need not be seen through the heroic lens of intentionalist transformation. Counterintuitive as it sounds, ‘agency’ might also look limp, and seem quiet. It might be a clinging to the faint possibility of things being otherwise, or the repetition of a practice that merely keeps one’s head bobbing above seemingly rising waters. It is the faintness, the weediness and the ‘merely’-ness that I see as characteristic of Jagose’s queer consideration of complex agency.

Fortunately, Jagose’s *Counterfeit pleasures* forms part of an ongoing debate about queer agency. Theoretical work which ‘queers’ agency has tended to emerge from sexuality studies, and has had some productive conversations about Jagose’s work (Allen, 2011, 2012a, 2012b; Allen & Carmody, 2012; Burford & Kindon, 2015; Gavey, 2012; Opperman, Braun, Clarke, & Rogers, 2014). Gavey (2012) for example, appreciates Jagose’s novel re-framing of a widely disparaged (‘unfeminist’, ‘unqueer’, ‘unliberated’) erotic practice as an innovation. She is
equally interested in the messiness of the scene of fake orgasm, emphasising that it: ‘may embody certain forms of resistance at the same time as it perhaps embodies a kind of obedience to normative expectations of the good feminine subject’ (p. 720). While she values Jagose’s ‘respectful’ analysis, Gavey (2012) draws a distinction between the Jagosian framing of complex agency, and a feminist project of ‘empowerment’. Fake orgasm may, she argues, be recognisable as political given contemporary constraints, but it can only be described as ‘empowering’ if the practitioner has political intent. To consider fake orgasm ‘empowered’, Gavey argues:

... might be a mistake that forecloses opportunities not only for elaborating critique of the cultural conditions of possibility that provide such limited options for ways of acceptably practising sex (such that it might feel “required” by too many women in too many circumstances); but also, at the level of the individual it honours only one of the possible stories that likely can be told about this practice (2012, p. 720).

Gavey’s (2012) engagement with Jagose’s text helps to illuminate the ontological tensions of these different research agendas. Her conversation is framed in terms of ‘resistance’, ‘intent’ and ‘empowerment’, in contrast to Jagose’s more ambivalent vocabulary of ‘politics’, ‘passivity’ and ‘agency’. Gavey suggests that feminists should hold out for more – her bottom line is that a grip must be retained ‘on the challenge of a politics of change’ (2012, p. 723). Implicitly, her argument asks questions about the utility of a Jagosian queer(y)ing methodology as a political practice (as in: ‘so what if fake orgasm is agentic, where does it really take us?’). While not abandoning critique, I think it is fair to say that Jagose evacuates herself from particular narratives of critique that Gavey remains attached to. Certainly, Jagose’s work does point out cracks in normatively critical views of a particular de-legitimated erotic practice, and does not offer a
particular, future-focused, narrative for resistance and transformation. But this ought not be seen as an abandonment of political critique itself, rather an alternative mode of critique, one that is less certain, and more counterintuitive. It seems to me that this queer approach to political critique may apprehend alternate possibilities for thinking and seeing the political itself.

Allen’s work (Allen, 2011, 2012a, 2013; Allen & Carmody, 2012) on queer agency seems to offer a bridge between the positions of Jagose (2010) and Gavey (2012). In her article Pleasure’s perils (2012a), Allen problematises the proposition that experiencing sexual pleasure can be equated with empowerment, as is theorised by much feminist work. Rather than opening predictably onto a more liberated future, Allen foregrounds the unpredictability of pleasure’s discursive enactment. As she notes, the way pleasure is now frequently configured as an imperative (sex should be pleasurable) can have regulatory effects. Privileging the attainment of personal pleasure may obscure the fact that there are myriad reasons that people may be sexual, and not all of them are about feeling good:

Sexual activity is often actively and purposively engaged in for reasons other than personal pleasure. It can serve as a means of attaining something else we want, like money, a child, some sleep, peer status, emotional security, to feel desired, to be ‘normal’, to pleasure someone else (rather than ourselves), to heal (ourselves or someone else) or to hurt (ourselves or others) (2012a, p. 464).

She also notes that pleasure can be co-opted within particular religious discourses, as in ‘sex outside of marriage will not be pleasurable, so don’t do it’ – which undercuts the ‘liberatory’ investments many feminist researchers have in pleasure.
While Allen (2012a) acknowledges that pleasure may not offer such a predictable pathway for future-focused transformation, this does not mean that it should necessarily be abandoned. Even though the practice of pleasure in sexuality education may appear different to what was initially imagined by many feminists, it remains potentially agentic, even if this is a mode of agency of the ‘strange’ and ‘twisted’ sort. Helpfully for my purposes in this chapter, Allen (2012a) calls attention to the ‘complexities of the practices of theory’ (p. 467). She draws on Youdell’s (2009) work to think through the tensions between ‘intellectual work’ and ‘pragmatic politics’:

The solution to this tension Youdell (2009) proposes is to let Queer and poststructural theory and what she conceptualizes as ‘left politics’, co-exist and address each other. This is the space I have come to occupy. It is an existence characterized by perpetual mutability, illuminated by theoretical and lived conceptual tensions, which I struggle to draw into conversation (Allen, 2012a, p. 267).

In Pleasure’s perils, Allen foregrounds the possibilities of Jagose’s counterintuitive, and queer agency as a form of ‘intellectual work’. Yet at the same time she refuses to let go of her ‘pragmatic political’ conviction to put pleasure to work, an agenda that has characterised many of her previous contributions. I find myself in a similar position, following the possibilities of ‘queer agency’ without abandoning the possibilities, or practice, of critical political thinking/work.

Re-reading the agency in ‘keeping calm and carrying on’ writing
In this final section, I wish to unpack how a Jagosian-inspired queer methodology might be applied in order to re-read Catherine’s account. As I see it, there are certain similarities between the sexual practice of fake orgasm and the affective practice of ‘keeping calm and carrying on’ which bring the question of agency into view. Where Jagose identifies the ‘fist-fucker’ as the favoured figure for queer analyses of sexual politics, I have suggested we might see the ‘protester’ (Gill, 2010), and the ‘collectivised subject’ (Thatcher, 2012) as equivalent figures among political analyses of higher education. The positioning of these figures as legitimately political casts a shadow over other, ‘illegitimate’ figures. As Jagose has outlined, one particularly shady practice, from the perspective of queer, feminist and left political analysis at least, is the practice of fake orgasm. I am suggesting that the affective subject position that I have interpreted in Catherine’s account would be typically constituted in much the same way within the existing logics of higher education research. The calm, self-managing doctoral student who (over)complies with institutional writing expectations becomes recognisable as either a victim of neoliberal reform and/or a complicit partner in perpetuating neoliberal governance. This docile figure is intelligible as a political failure and, as such, the complexities of her affective-political subjectivity tend to remain unexplored.

Following Jagose, I have decided to take Catherine’s affective performance seriously – not as a problem for higher education, but to see what possibilities its consideration might open. I suggest that re-examining Catherine’s practice using such a queer methodology creates an opportunity to rethink familiar knowledges about the relation between affect and politics in higher education. This opportunity is perhaps best illustrated by paraphrasing Jagose directly. It is by failing to be legible that keeping calm and carrying on:
intervenes in the presumption that to register as political [affective] practices must be keyed to productive action, must move things along and make stuff happen ... [keeping calm and carrying on] continues to hold open an alternate way of thinking about the political, offering not a future-directed strategy for political transformation but an eloquent figure for political engagement with the conditions of the present. (Jagose, 2010, p. 532)

In this paragraph, Jagose suggests that the strategic possibilities of ‘pessimistic’ practices – like keeping calm and carrying on – do require further exploration. Of course, by calmly and ‘responsibly’ managing her emotions in line with the normative expectations of the neoliberal university, Catherine can be viewed as a passive and dis-empowered political subject. However, there remains a possibility that even suspicious practices might open up onto narrow modes of agency. Surprising as it sounds, Catherine’s case might allow us to see modes of ‘agency’ that do not look or feel powerful.

This kind of methodology for re-considering the visibility of agency might resource higher education researchers to offer more nuanced accounts of affective-political practice in the present. I am suggesting that within Catherine’s politically depressed scene, keeping calm and carrying on may open onto a mode of agency that is more about survival, than it is about empowerment. By acknowledging the constrained field of possibility that the contemporary university presents, and stopping to consider even the least likely political practice, higher education researchers might begin to recognise subjects who exercise agency in order to manage, cope, make do, muddle through and survive. As Jagose rightly points out, the agentic outcomes of such practices are only really knowable after the fact of their doing. Continuing to keep calm might
hold open the possibility of Catherine carrying on to do things differently, even if, as Jagose notes, they will likely be done just the same.

I would like to be clear that the purpose of my chapter has not been to make recommendations for doctoral students to enact the same kind of practice as Catherine. This kind of queer theoretical work does not offer a particular blueprint for resistance and transformation. Instead, I have sought to explore how queer theory might broaden the affective-political imaginary of higher education research. In making my argument, I am not disparaging researchers who attempt to tease out recognisably ‘resistant’ affective-political responses. I am suggesting that higher education researchers might not only interpret traditional – and therefore easily recognisable – practices such as protest, unionisation and refusal as forms of political action but see that other modes, perhaps animated by less celebrated feelings, are also possible.

The purpose of this chapter has been to make an unsettling contribution to higher education debates on the politics of affect. My application of Jagose’s queer methodology has enabled me to queer(y) the logics that appear to have congealed around recognition of the political consequence of affect. I have sought to exert pressure on existing categories in order to both question certain privileged modes of political agency and bring into view alternative modes of being a political subject in higher education. I have argued that despite its mundane and pessimistic appearance, calm emotional management may open onto agency, albeit an agency of a narrow and more twisted kind. My chapter has also accomplished something else. By using queer concepts to explore the politics of affect and doctoral writing, I unsettle assumptions about the proper
objects for queer thinking in higher education research (Gowlett & Rasmussen, 2014). I hope my application of queer theory beyond the realms of sex, sexuality and gender prompts further queer(y)ings of all manner of projects of higher education inquiry.
FIGURE 5. Susan’s picture after writing
CHAPTER 4

NOT WRITING, AND GIVING ‘ZERO F**KS’ ABOUT IT

Queer(y)ing doctoral ‘failure’

If at first you don’t succeed, failure might be your style.
(Quentin Crisp, 1968, p. 196)

This chapter critically examines the intersection of doctoral writing, feeling and failure. My interest in this topic has been stirred by failure’s recent rise to trendiness (O’Gorman & Werry, 2012). Over the past several years, ‘failure’ has generated columns in magazines and newspapers (Berret, 2014; Sobel, 2014), inspired cultural texts (Auster, 1997; Coyote & Spoon, 2014) and become an increasingly popular focus across disciplines (Bailes, 2010; Bennet, 2013; Haiven & Khasnabish, 2013; Le Feuvre, 2010). Doctoral education is no exception. Even a brief glance reveals multiple angles of interest: from the failure of doctoral advice texts (Kamler & Thomson, 2008), to mentoring (Hall & Burns, 2009), and assessment (Webb, Brien, & Burr, 2013). Even when the ‘f-word’ itself is absent, conversations are awash with the ‘stuff’ of failure (Carr, 2013, p. 5). While doctoral education policy and research has long been populated by drop-outs and the dilatory (Rudd, 1986; Tuckman, Coyle, & Bae, 1989; Wright, 1964), it has increasingly turned its attention to supervisors who founder, fall short, or fade away, and a qualification that all too often disappoints, leaving many graduates in debt and unemployed.

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All this interest in failure and the doctorate – despite the reality that very few students who submit their theses are actually failed by examiners (Holbrook & Bourke, 2004). As Golding, Sharmini, and Lazarovitch (2014) observe, examiners are generally reluctant to fail doctoral theses: ‘they consider a thesis a pass until it is proven to fail, and will only consider failing a thesis if there are significant errors or omissions that threaten the credibility of the research’ (p. 568). For example, Lovat, Holbrook, and Bourke (2008, p. 70) draw on an Australian sample to place the examination failure rate at less than 1%. Despite the infrequency of examination failure, its feelings appear ‘stickier’ (Ahmed, 2004b), with ‘horror stories’ (Connell, 1985, p. 40) and ‘traumatic’ anecdotes abounding ‘among the student body’ (Mullins & Kiley, 2002, p. 369). Inconsistencies such as this one have persuaded me that failure, feeling, and the PhD form a rich cultural scene that calls for some detailed inquiry.

It is the purpose of this chapter to use queer concepts in order to make an unsettling contribution to established knowledge about ‘failure’ and ‘success’ in the context of doctoral education. Through tracking meanings about failure, and looking carefully at what failure might do and feel like, I argue we can unpick assumptions about the relationship between failure, affect, and politics. In the following section, I trace two ways of thinking about ‘failure’ in the literature on postgraduate education.

**A pit stop, a dead end: Conceptualising failure in postgraduate education**

Postgraduate education as both an area of cultural practice and one of inquiry tends to be fixated on the object of ‘successful’ completion. This in turn shapes
the modes available to interpret failure. Looking across the field of postgraduate education, at least two conventional patterns of thinking about failure can be discerned. The first is to view it as a toxic object that ought to be avoided. This is what Webb et al. (2013) call the Kranzian\(^{37}\) model, where educational failure is simply not an option. By this way of thinking, failure is the binary opposite to success, presenting a danger (McWilliam, Singh, & Taylor, 2002) and a ‘dead end’ (O’Gorman & Werry, 2012, p. 1):

For the university, students who do not complete, or do not complete in a timely fashion, are markers of failure, bringing into question the academic rigour and integrity of the institution and its HDR [Higher Degree Research] processes, and causing the loss of an income stream, and of the investment the university has made in that student. (Webb et al., 2013, p. 4)

This ‘toxic’ meaning of failure is frequently cast as a judgment, and the ‘failed’ educational subject becomes associated with undesirable qualities such as ‘error and incompetence’ (Le Feuvre, 2010, p. 12).

A second, and often co-existing, habit of thinking about failure is to view it as a training ground for success. This is what Webb et al. (2013) call the Fordian\(^{38}\) perspective: where failure is acceptable so long as it generates learning. By this meaning, failure has redemptive qualities; it can be a ‘pit stop’ (O’Gorman & Werry, 2012, p. 1) that builds more resilient subjects, and prepares the conditions

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\(^{37}\) This is taken from the book title of former NASA flight director Gene Kranz (2000).

\(^{38}\) The quotation ‘failure is simply the opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently’ is one that can be found on mugs, t-shirts and as an inspirational meme across the Internet. It is often attributed to the American Industrialist Henry Ford without a source. However, the only attribution I can find is to the quote ‘Failure is only the opportunity more intelligently to begin again’ from Ford’s 1923 book *My Life and Work* (p. 19).
for future success. The ‘training-ground’ meaning of failure can be traced across popular articles on postgraduate education. For example, Krebs (2012, para. 9) suggests that humanities students are not good at appreciating the ‘value of failure’ when compared to their colleagues in computer science. Echoing Beckett’s famous words, she argues that humanities students need to learn to fail better (Krebs, 2012). Her message is repeated by Ray (2015), who suggests that failure and rejection teach us about academic writing, and that postgraduate students might learn more from rejection letters than acceptances. She goes so far as to recommend that rejection letters might be used as ‘wallpaper’ in our offices, or be ‘boxed up in a closet, as if they were medals of honour’ (Ray, 2015, para. 1).

Rather than ‘toxic’ or ‘dead’, this second habit of thinking about failure is connected to experimentation, development, and progress (Le Feuvre, 2010). While often presented as a novel twist on what it means to fail, as the articles above suggest, this recuperative sentiment has in fact become rather commonplace. And in spite of being presented as a more productive route for making meaning about failure, the ‘pit-stop’ approach is far from uncontroversial. Indeed, within the context of HE, it has been suggested that taking failure as the training ground for success looks rather similar to the ‘neoliberal fetish’ of innovation39 (O’Gorman & Werry, 2012, p. 1). Arguably, failure has become ‘a necessity in a world without guarantees: in getting comfortable with failure … we can also get comfortable with neoliberalism’s other intimate, precarity’ (O’Gorman & Werry, 2012, p. 1).

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39 In a neoliberal era characterised by increasing deregulation, and the privatisation of public assets, a guiding principle for social and economic development has been ‘innovation’. The language of ‘innovation’ is not neutral. It often goes hand in hand with other words like ‘austerity’ and ‘competition’, and can be used to justify reduced public investment as well as to reduce the social meaning of higher education to economic outcomes (see Pekkola, 2009).
O’Gorman and Werry’s mapping of the meanings of failure within postgraduate education affords a helpful departure point for my argument. In the remainder of this chapter I seek to queerly destabilise the habits of thinking that they have identified. The chapter proceeds with an overview of contemporary debates about queer concepts and their intersection with failure in the form of Halberstam’s (2011) work *The queer art of failure*. The second section presents findings from a larger qualitative project, where I examine one case study in order to consider what a queered concept of failure might do when read against the field of doctoral writing pedagogies and research. I argue that, while doctoral ‘failure’ often generates clusters of challenging feelings such as guilt, shame, and disappointment, it is also possible that ‘failing’ to write, or being a ‘failed writer’, can induce alternative affects such as relief, satisfaction, and even joy. Rather than being avoided or learned from, writing failure might instead be interpreted as a rich analytic tool that can generate ways of thinking, doing, and being that tend to be ‘foreclosed by the normative tyranny of success and expected outcomes’ (O’Gorman & Werry, 2012, p. 2). When we look at doctoral writing failure as a possible position to inhabit, rather than a place of lack, or temporary space for development, we might discern its possibilities for discontent, critique, and the rejection of arguably hollow meanings of ‘success’.

**Queer concepts**

This chapter may be understood as contributing to broader conversations that have drawn on queer concepts in educational research (Burford, 2015b; Gowlett, 2014; Gowlett & Rasmussen, 2014; Rasmussen & Allen, 2014). Such discussions have expanded significantly over recent years (Allen, 2015; Allen & Rasmussen,
but still remain relatively scarce in the field of higher education itself (Renn, 2010). Queer concepts highlight cracks in sensibility, which in turn foreground the ‘rigidity of many social attitudes and practices’ (Gowlett & Rasmussen, 2014, p. 333). By examining seemingly neutral practices ‘and creating a discomfort about them’, queer concepts can illuminate alternative ways of doing and being (Gowlett & Rasmussen, 2014, p. 333). In this chapter I draw on queer concepts to ‘shake and unsettle’ knowledge that has thickened around failure and doctoral writing (Gowlett & Rasmussen, 2014, p. 333).

The argument I make here was inspired by two invitations issued by Rasmussen and Allen in a recent (2014) article. The first was to re-think what queer concepts might do in educational research. I have taken up their challenge to bust through the tendency to ‘corral’ queer theory within a ‘cul de sac of studies of sexuality and gender’ (Rasmussen & Allen, 2014, p. 434). In offering a queer analysis of doctoral writing, I enable queer concepts to travel to places ‘where, at first glance they appear to have no place or purchase’ (p. 433). My expanded usage of queer theory assists me to interrogate ‘borders of intelligibility’ (Gowlett, 2015, p. 408) across a wider field of inquiry in higher education. A second invitation made in Rasmussen and Allen’s article was to examine the queer possibilities of different kinds of thinking about failure in educational research (2014, p. 434). The key resource I take up in order to address this call is Halberstam’s (2011) work The *queer art of failure*. As I explain next, this book offers researchers a novel methodology for generating discomfort about privileged categories of ‘success’, at the same time as illuminating the other ways of doing and being that failure might open.

**Flunks, flops, and clinkers: Failure as a queer art?**
The queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being. (Halberstam, 2011, p. 88)

As the quote above implies, queer theorists have begun to offer more capacious understandings of failure than the two meanings – the pit stop, and the dead end – that I sketched in the first section of this chapter. In taking failure as a ‘queer art’, Halberstam insists that we examine failure on its own terms, not simply as falling short or a learning opportunity that brings us ever closer to normative success. According to Halberstam, we might understand failure (alongside ‘stupidity’, ‘forgetting’, and ‘negation’) as offering counter-intuitive ways of being in the world. This means that failure may be discerned as a practice that can open routes of anti-normative becoming. Such an understanding of failure, as a methodology to address punishing norms, is one that feminists have long explored:

Where feminine success is always measured by male standards, and gender failure often means being relieved of the pressure to measure up to patriarchal ideals, not succeeding at womanhood can offer unexpected pleasures. (Halberstam, 2011, p. 4)

The proposition that failure might be practised has also received critical attention in transgender communities. In their recent book Gender failure, performers Ivan Coyote and Rae Spoon (2014) document journeys from childhoods of failing to fit into the gender binary to, well, adulthoods of gender failure too. The issue that the authors highlight is that cisgender, and even transgender, ‘success’ is often measured in terms of successfully ‘passing’, as a man, or a woman, or from one gender to another. For those of us who cannot pass, or do not wish to pass,
gender failure can generate a queer terrain to inhabit. Rather than this necessarily being a site of lack or mourning, this territory can operate with its own logics, desires, and pleasures. It also affords important possibilities to critique the very system that structures such conventional and narrow expectations about gender; arguably it is a system that fails us all. Spoon, in particular, offers us a response to ‘failing’ at gender that is in the spirit of Halberstam’s ‘queer art’, charting their development from cis-girlhood, to lesbianism, to trans-masculinity to gender ‘retirement’ (p. 249). Rather than striving ever harder in the pursuit of normative gender ‘success’, Spoon has spoken instead about their resignation from the personal life-project of gender coherence, and the burden of convincing others that they have a consistent and secure place in the gender binary. While the sex on their ID card might read ‘F’, Spoon assures us that this in fact stands for ‘Fuck Gender’ (p. 251).

However, my own career as a binary gender refusenik has taught me that failure projects a rather complex and contradictory scene. While it might gesture toward liberatory openings, in practice failure may also be mediated by quotidian concerns of comfort, practicality, and survival. Even those of us who lean in toward failure may not do so consistently. Sometimes ‘passing’ might keep us going to fail another day. We must also remember that some of us risk more than others when we fail. In this regard, Taylor (2012) has critiqued the ‘romanticized appeal to “fail” and step out of the system’ (p. 69) and reminded us that ‘not everyone gets to rebrand their “failures” as successes’ (p. 68). Taking working-class education subjects as an example, Taylor cautions that ‘some classed bodies/citizens/families/futures are already lost and dis-invested in; some bodies simply do not get imagined as having a presence or a future’ (p. 69). While heeding Taylor’s call to remember failure’s complex relationship to privilege, I
do not think that Halberstam’s (2011) methodology inevitably leads us to romanticism, or failure as a stepping out. As we will see in the case study I introduce below, sometimes failure can be a practical strategy for getting out, but also for getting through. Equally, remembering the possibility that one might step out (or in this case drop out) can create spaciousness for education subjects who do decide to persist.

In sum, doctoral education’s logics of success shape available ways for failure to be interpreted. To embrace the queer logic defined by Halberstam (2011) and evoked by Coyote and Spoon (2014) would be to look to failure as a site of possibility, rather than lack. This logic calls us to create some productive ‘discomfort’ (Gowlett & Rasmussen, 2014, p. 333) about the actions and identities associated with failure. The hunch I am pursuing in this chapter is that such a queer mode of reading doctoral writing ‘failure’ might resource higher education researchers to destabilise normative routes, conventions, and investments in doctoral success, as well as to glimpse alternative ways of becoming doctoral.

**Methods**

The study upon which this chapter is based was conducted at a research-intensive university in Aotearoa New Zealand between February and June 2013. It involved 10 participants, all of whom were doctoral students connected to faculties of Arts and Education, and at various stages of their doctoral experience. The methods used in the study comprised a form of diary-interview technique (Spowart & Nairn, 2014), which involved an initial meeting, followed by a period of independent diary-based data collection, and a follow-up in-depth interview. Participants were encouraged to record the details of their writing
practice, and to reflect on what it felt like to write, and become a doctoral writer. The second set of methods was conducted at a three-day residential retreat held at a rural location north of Auckland. The retreat was inspired by Grant’s Women Writing Away model (Grant, 2008), and involved a series of arts-based research activities, group discussions, and personal writing time. Reading across the words and images generated by these methods, I became attentive to moments where participants appeared to negotiate their constitution as doctoral students who were ‘failing’ to write, or as ‘failed’ writers. I was particularly interested in forming a sense of failure’s feelings, and its political possibilities. In order to flesh out these thoughts, I have elected to draw on the stories of one participant, Ricki, which were generated across their40 diary and interview.

**Becoming a ‘zero-fucks giver’: Ricki’s story**

At the time the study was conducted, Ricki was a full-time doctoral student in their mid-30s, studying in a Faculty of Arts. They were nearing the end of the first year of their PhD. I had previously met Ricki, once at a conference, and on another two occasions through mutual friends. Throughout our interview, which lasted nearly two hours, Ricki and I roamed across various topics. While much of our talk focused on doctoral writing and life, we also strayed into areas that were of mutual interest, such as gender and body size. Indeed, upon reading the interview transcript, it was these two topics that first alerted me to the possibility

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40 In the course of our interview I asked Ricki if they had a preferred gender pronoun. They responded that they were ambivalent about the pronoun and pseudonym attributed to them in this study. I have elected to use non-binary pronouns (they, them, their) to refer to Ricki in this article. I hope by raising the profile of non-normative gender identity and pronouns in this way to trouble research practices which take ‘common sense’ approaches to the discernment and reporting of gender in educational research.
that something interesting was happening with the idea of ‘failure’ in our interaction.

In the first case, Ricki declined to identify a pronoun for use in this study:

James: What pronouns do you use?
Ricki: In lots of ways I don’t feel committed enough to pronouns to care … I feel like I have an increasingly secure sense of my, um, inbetweenness, and not just a sense of it, but a comfort with it, and even a celebration of it.

Similar to Coyote and Spoon above, Ricki understood themself as occupying a position beyond the gender binary. In explaining this comment to me, Ricki went on to describe a caption they had recently seen in a magazine, which labelled the Disney sweetheart-turned-twerkster Miley Cyrus as a ‘booty dancer and zero-fucks-giver’ (Breslaw, 2013). Ricki, in fits of giggles, announced how enthusiastically they identified with this description. Rather than retain an investment in the conventional gender system, Ricki wished to ‘pull a stiff bird [middle finger] at binary constructions … So now I will just say no thanks very much’. Ricki’s polite ‘no thank you’, and more assertive ‘zero-fucks-giver’, are subject positions vis-à-vis failure that have resonance with Halberstam’s ‘ecstatic loser’ (2011, p. 5) or Gilson’s ‘heretic navigator’ (2012, p. 9). In contrast to the two notions of failure O’Gorman and Werry (2012) helpfully sketched, these subject positions look normativity and ‘success’ in the eye, and then move in another direction. Of primary interest to me was the way Ricki addressed the social scene of failure that such a non-performance would commonly project. Rather than accepting that they simply ‘failed’ to do normative gender correctly, Ricki externalised this failure by emphasising that despite years of working with the concepts, it was in fact binary masculinity and femininity that had failed them.
A similar logic was visible when Ricki addressed their experience of being constituted as ‘overweight’. Ricki rejected the normative designation of fat bodies as failed bodies, emphasising instead the way they valued fatness, alongside all forms of ‘delighted embodiment’. Reading across the transcript I discern a number of examples where Ricki troubles normative categories of failure and success. Ricki deployed this logic in the context of both gender and body size, as I described above, which are two arenas that have been extensively considered by queer researchers (Halberstam, 1998; Pausé, Wykes, & Murray, 2014). Most salient for this chapter, however, was that Ricki applied a similar queer logic to our discussion on (not) writing their PhD.

**Not writing: Unbecoming a doctoral writer?**

During our interview, Ricki mentioned they had spent much of the first year of their doctorate not writing. At Ricki’s university, the initial 12 months of a full-time doctoral degree are provisional, and in order to continue to full doctoral status, candidates must meet a series of compulsory goals. In Ricki’s department these included: completing a full thesis proposal (5000–8000 words); a ‘substantial’ piece of writing (5000–8000 words); presenting the proposal, or work-in-progress to a review panel; evidence that Human Ethics Committee approval had been sought or granted; sitting a diagnostic English language needs assessment; and attendance at a doctoral induction day.

I asked Ricki how their writing had been going and their response to my question characterised the tone of much of our subsequent discussion:

> Well, and I am gonna use this, straight off the cuff, to make a complaint, not at you, but at this thing of experience of the first year of my PhD, around this emphasis on writing ... it’s all I have heard since the first day I
started my PhD was ‘well, you’ve gotta start writing, like you’ve gotta write!’ . And it’s like, what am I writing?

Ricki expanded on their ‘complaint’, noting that these ‘you’ve gotta write’ messages began at the compulsory induction day, but were present across their doctoral encounters. This ranged from supervisors, who ‘are kind of right into “start writing!”’; departmental instructions; as well as the broader environment that surrounds writing:

Ricki: ... a sense of wherever I have gone in terms of PhD infrastructure it has kind of been like: ‘Writing! Write!’

James: So it is a part of the landscape? It’s in the walls?

Ricki: Yeah, yeah. It does feel like that.

Ricki’s observation about the saturation level of this message may not come as a surprise. That doctoral students ought to ‘get writing’ from the beginning is now commonplace advice that arises in doctoral guidebooks (Phillips & Pugh, 2010, p. 73), blogs (Cayley, 2012; Duncan, 2012), and writing workshops. Rather than take this advice, however, Ricki used the occasion of our interview to challenge its universal application and enforcement. Ricki took issue with the uniform emphasis on early doctoral writing, arguing that it would be ‘absolutely fine [if] your process takes you to that’ but to be ‘constantly externally disciplined around writing at this stage’ felt like ‘an administrative task’ and ‘a kind of silliness’.

Ricki also situated the pressure to begin writing ‘successfully’ within the broader political context of higher education reform:
My sense is the goals here are to have your PhD done, have a unit of work, um, that we are just kind of these little worker bees, who have to meet our milestones and produce this piece of work and be done, and yeah, so I sat there cynically [at the doctoral induction], oh yeah, neoliberal times, and of course the messages we are getting around our PhDs is that the only really important thing is that you finish them. Not the quality of the work, or what you learn, or where it leads you, or what you can contribute to society. It’s a finished piece of product, so they can tick the thing, and get their money presumably for a completed PhD, and the university can get on with it.

Here, Ricki characterises the context of neoliberal reform to higher education over recent decades. In alignment with the corporate university’s values of ‘profit, control and efficiency’ (Giroux, 2002, p. 434), recent transformations to doctoral education have been guided by an instrumental desire to get more students through doctoral programmes more quickly. In order to achieve this goal, universities have increasingly turned to practices of audit such as the compulsory goals of the ‘provisional year’ sketched above. Arguably, as Ricki identifies, these reforms have had the effect of narrowing how a doctorate can be described and imagined. Rather than ‘getting on with it’, and ‘ticking the box’, Ricki wished to contest the ‘little worker bee’ imagining of doctoral being. Through their talk, Ricki repeatedly re-focused doctoral writing away from the ‘unit’ of writing and onto what they described as the broader learning potential of the doctoral writer in pursuit of a ‘creative intellectual project’. As Ricki argued, this writer may have their own ‘goals’, passions, and rhythms to follow.

I have presented Ricki’s story several times at conferences. Often I have decided to stop the account at this point. Inevitably, audience members ask what happened following our interview. Did Ricki continue not writing? Did they fail to submit the required documentation for their provisional review? Have they
dropped out? The answer to each of these questions is no. Ricki eventually did submit the documents required by their institution, which enabled them to ‘pass’ through their provisional year and onto full doctoral candidature.

**Failure’s feelings**

Having established Ricki’s description, and their interpretation of the scene, I became interested in reading the transcript a second time for practices of affect (Wetherell, 2012). What emerged was a complex and, at times, contradictory account of failure’s feelings. As outlined above, Ricki had noticed a saturation of messages that urged doctoral students to write, and had some political reservations about them. When I asked Ricki to explain what this felt like, they evoked a background feeling of being ‘moved along’. Now, it is important to clarify that Ricki did not describe the feeling of being ‘moved’ as mild. Instead, they described it as pressured, as if there was force being applied in the injunction to ‘move!’. For example, Ricki described the being ‘moved’ as ‘not enjoyable’, ‘fraught’, and akin to ‘psychological warfare, it’s like, can you hack it?’. As we already know, for much of the first year Ricki was not ‘moving along’. Ricki described the feelings associated with not writing as generating a private scene of ‘anxiety’, ‘stress’, and ‘worry’. The provisional review also offered the possibility of a public scene of shame, and embarrassment. Not only might Ricki fail to ‘hack it’ emotionally, or fail to ‘move along’, but their writing itself might be deemed to fail in the eyes of review panel. Ricki sketches the way these stakes hover in the background, with some humour: ‘maybe none of the work I have produced is any good, and the provisional review is gonna be like: “You are out!” Ha ha. You are voted out of Tribal Council!’
This mixture of heavy affects eventually led Ricki to a ‘low place’ where they questioned whether they wished to be a doctoral student at all. However, they went on to describe an important moment. I asked Ricki whether their feelings about writing had changed during the course of their first year, Ricki replied that their feelings had shifted several months before our interview. While Ricki’s feelings on ‘the PhD in the university system’ had not altered, crucially their feelings about what ‘success’ and ‘failure’ meant inside this system had:

I feel like I have spent ten months wrestling that back, and kind of going, no I am not going to be subjected by that to the extent that I can’t enjoy this process, and if I can’t make this a dynamic, exciting, creative process for me then I don’t want to do it, and the end product isn’t really the point, the great privilege of this is the concentrated time in adult life to learn, and to read and to think, and to write and to develop thinking and yeah, if I can’t do that then I won’t do a PhD. Yeah. So it’s taken a long time of feeling anxious, and kind of like, ‘I am going to fail’, and I am not doing this right, and now kind of going, ahh, I am taking it back, and I am going to do this my way.

This extract illustrates the complexity of failure’s feelings. Here, I read Ricki’s ‘no’ and ‘I won’t do a PhD’ as evidence of defiance and dissent, a position Ricki came to after ten months of emotional ‘wrestling’. I read too the affects that Ricki values in doctoral education, ‘enjoyment’, ‘dynamism’, and ‘excitement’. Yet, the most challenging part of this extract is the somewhat ambiguous ‘ahh’ in the final line. Listening to the audio recording, I hear an ‘ahh’ of relief in their decision to reframe the meaning of failure in relation to their own PhD. However, it might also be interpreted as a satisfied ‘ahh’, in sticking it to the university system, and troubling the normative narrative of doctoral ‘success’. While the nature of this exclamation remains unclear, either of these two possible
readings seem to hold open important potentialities for re-framing how failure to write can feel.

If we read the affective material I have identified in the text together, I suggest we can see a crucial shift in Ricki’s affective subject position vis-à-vis failure. While initially Ricki took ownership of the ‘stress’, ‘worry’, and ‘anxiety’ associated with ‘not doing it [writing] right’, in this account Ricki returns the failure to the institution and its limited imagination regarding what a PhD can be. Additionally, Ricki declares they would rather refuse ‘being’ a doctoral student, where such a being has been pre-defined in oppositional ways to enjoyment, dynamism, excitement, and creativity. In ‘taking back’ the PhD and doing it ‘their way’, Ricki again constitutes themselves as ‘zerofucks giver’ – a person who turns away from normative expectations of what ‘successful’ modes of doctoral becoming are supposed to be in pursuit of alternatives. This process of realisation, of seeing that there were alternative (potentially less ‘successful’) ways of becoming doctoral, affected Ricki deeply. During our interview Ricki rolled up their shirtsleeve in order to show me something. It was a tattoo. They told me that they had decided to mark a lesson they had learned during their first doctoral year. The quote is attributed to Foucault, and reads: ‘We are much freer than we think’.

**Queer(y)ing doctoral writing ‘success’**

Within the culture of audit that is threaded across contemporary HE, Ricki’s ‘failure’ to write for a lengthy period of their first doctoral year would be conventionally taken as a cause for concern, if not intervention. By not writing, Ricki risked being cast as a failure; an ineffective, or undisciplined student, and
more crudely as a poor investment of institutional resources. However, during our interview Ricki worked to inscribe alternative meanings to this scene of ‘failure’ by locating it inside a broader affective-political context. Ricki asserted that there ought to be more to a PhD than merely becoming a ‘worker bee’. By reading the text for its affective practices (Wetherell, 2012), I have suggested that we can re-consider failure’s feelings. Rather than accept implication in social discourses of guilt, shame, and disappointment about not writing, Ricki returned these feelings to the institution and its narrow imagining of what a PhD, and how a doctoral writer, could be. While failure appeared to generate ‘anxiety’, ‘worry’, ‘stress’, and ‘fear’ for Ricki, their account might encourage higher education researchers, doctoral students, and supervisors to keep open the queer possibility that sometimes failure can be associated with other feelings like ‘relief’ or ‘satisfaction’.

A cynical critic might read Ricki as foolish or silly (why don’t they just write?). Alternatively, Ricki’s failure could be seen as a ‘falling short’ that they (and perhaps I) work in the interview to cover up. Yet thinking with Halberstam’s queer methodology offers alternative explanations. Through my reading of Ricki’s account, I suggest that we ought to hold open the possibility that not writing may be an investment in an alternative strategy of doctoral learning. To do so requires that we estrange ourselves from normative routes of thinking about doctoral writing, which would ordinarily cast early experiences of not writing as a problem of pedagogy, ability, or attitude. When we look for what is artful in Ricki’s failure, we begin to discern possibilities, strategies, and savvy. We locate alternative (non)sensibilities, attachments, and affects. As Halberstam argues, the practice of failure can discern alternatives that are ‘embedded already in the dominant’ (Halberstam, 2011, p. 88). This is a sentiment that echoes Ricki’s
tattoo: we are much freer than we think. By refusing to become ‘productive’ in ways that are expected and valued by the institution, Ricki may be interpreted as refusing the position of the ‘good’ (Grant, 1997), self-managing, doctoral writer. Another way of putting this is that Ricki enacts a practice of not doing doctoral ‘success’.

The question remains: how do we understand Ricki queerly? Clearly, the refusal that I have documented above offers no neat pathway to critical political transformation. Ricki speaks and acts in a spirit of refusal yet also ‘passes’ through their annual review. The narrative then cannot offer students a simple way out of compliance with the disciplinary norms enacted by higher education institutions. However, as Halberstam (2011) notes, we ought to remember the disruptive potential of practices that are more ‘symbolically redolent than materially transformative’ (p. 130):

> the history of alternative political formations ... contests social relations as given and allows us to access traditions of political action that, while not necessarily successful in the sense of becoming dominant, do offer models of contestation, rupture and discontinuity for the political present. These histories also identify potent avenues of failure, failures that we might build on in order to counter the logics of success that have emerged from the triumphs of global capitalism.

Ricki’s practice of not writing seems to offer one such ‘avenue of failure’. By illustrating Ricki’s case, I have sought to contest doctoral education’s normative imaginary. I want us to feel more uncomfortable about doctoral ‘success’ and to illuminate failure’s possibilities. I hope this account encourages doctoral students and their supervisors to flirt a little more with failure, and dance its fine line. Ricki’s account also offers us something else. It evokes a compelling vision of what doctoral ‘success’ might look like otherwise, in a queerer time and space.
FIGURE 6. Paula’s picture after writing
It all started with a tweet. On the afternoon of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} of June 2013, Professor Geoffrey Miller, an evolutionary psychologist at the University of New Mexico (UNM) and visiting instructor at New York University (NYU), tweeted out a message that would go on to generate a significant social media controversy. Addressing aspiring doctoral programme applicants, Miller wrote:

Dear obese PhD applicants: if you didn’t have the willpower to stop eating carbs, you won’t have the willpower to do a dissertation #truth

The response to Miller’s tweet was swift and fiery. Social media users began engaging with him on Twitter, and in the early hours of the controversy Miller defended the tweet. When one critic described his message as ‘judgmental,’ Miller replied that doing a dissertation is ‘about willpower/conscientiousness, not just smarts’ (Trotter, 2013). The tweet above, now screen captured, was shared widely and debated by journalists, Fat Acceptance activists, and academic social media users. Within hours Miller had deleted the tweet and replaced it with two new ones:

\footnote{An earlier version of this chapter was published in 2015, as “Dear obese PhD applicants”: Twitter, tumblr and the contested affective-politics of fat doctoral embodiment’ in \textit{M/C - A Journal of Media \& Culture}, 18(3).}
My sincere apologies to all for that idiotic, impulsive, and badly judged tweet. It does not reflect my true views, values, or standards.

Obviously my previous tweet does not represent the selection policies of any university, or my own selection criteria.

He then made his Twitter account private. The captured image, however, continued to spread. Across social media, users began to circulate a campaign that called for Miller to be formally disciplined (Trotter, 2013). There was also widespread talk about potential lawsuits from prospective students who were not selected for admission at UNM (Kirby, 2013). Indeed, the *Fat Chick Sings* blogger Jeanette DePatie offered her own advice to Miller: #findagoodlawyer.

Soon after the controversy emerged a response appeared on UNM’s website in the form of a video statement by Professor Jane Ellen Smith, the Chair of the UNM Psychology Department. Smith reiterated that Miller’s statements did not reflect the policies and admissions standards of UNM. She also stated that Miller had defended his actions by claiming the tweet was part of a ‘research project’ where he would deliberately send out provocative messages in order to measure the public response to them. This claim was met with incredulity by a number of bloggers and columnists, and was later determined to be incorrect in an Institutional Review Board inquiry at UNM, which concluded Miller’s tweets were ‘self-promotional’ in nature. Following a formal investigation, the UNM committee found no evidence that Miller had discriminated against overweight students. It did however pass a motion of censure that included a number of restrictions, including prohibiting Miller from sitting on any graduate admission committee at UNM.
The #truth about fat PhDs?

Readers may be wondering why a tweet such as this continues to matter as I write this chapter several years after the fact. I would like to note at the outset that it is not my intention to extend the period for criticising an individual academic, who, by his own admission, made an ‘idiotic, impulsive and badly judged’ public statement. I am less interested in the author of the tweet, and much more interested in the insights it affords into the cultural scene that surrounds the fat body in HE, and the way the fat bodies may be cast in the affective-political context of doctoral education. The extensive debate that arose around the tweet offers a diverse array of media texts that are available to help construct a more comprehensive picture regarding fat doctoral embodiment in the present. In order to make sense of Miller’s tweet I am suggesting we need to understand both the ways that cultural assumptions about fatness operate, as well as how they intersect with the increasing focus on the productivity of doctoral students (Bansel, 2011; Hopwood et al., 2011, Maher et al., 2008; Prasad, 2013).

For decades now, researchers have documented the existence of anti-fat attitudes (Crandall & Martinez, 1996). Increasingly, scholars and Fat Acceptance activists have described a ‘thinness norm’ that is reproduced across contemporary Western cultures, which discerns normatively slender bodies as ‘both healthy and beautiful’ (Eller, 2014, p. 220) and bodies that deviate from this norm, as ‘socially acceptable targets for shaming and hate speech’ (Eller, 2014, p. 220). In order to be intelligible Miller’s tweet relies on a number of deeply entrenched cultural meanings attributed to fatness and fat people. The first is that body-size is a rather simple a matter of self-control. Although Critical Fat Studies
researchers have argued for some time that body weight is determined by complex interactions between the biological and environmental, the belief that a large body size is caused by limited self-control remains prevalent. This in turn supports a host of cultural connotations, which tend to constitute fat people as ‘lazy, gluttonous, greedy, immoral, uncontrolled, stupid, ugly and lacking in willpower’ (Crimp, 2002, p. 4). In contemporary times, fatness has come to be seen as not only a ‘disease’ and an ‘epidemic’ but also a moral failing. Fat people, in turn, are socially constructed as parasites ‘monopolising healthcare resources while failing – or refusing – their responsibility as good neoliberal citizens to enact “proper” self-management through weight loss’ (Wykes, 2014, p. 2). In light of the above, Miller’s message ought to be read as a moral one. I have paraphrased its logic as such: if you [the fat doctoral student] cannot discipline your body into normatively desired slimness, you will also likely lack the willpower required to discipline your body-mind into completing your doctoral studies.

In this chapter, I am suggesting that to understand Miller’s tweet, we need understand both the persistence of anti-fat attitudes (Crandall & Martinez, 1996), as well the broader affective-political context of higher education. This means unpacking why it is that a social group that has a tendency to be associated with ‘lacking willpower’ might be identified as posing such a problem in the doctoral present. In the introductory chapter to this thesis I developed an account of the role that productivity now plays in the constitution of doctoral subjects. I argued that the expectations upon of doctoral students have intensified, with the length of time considered reasonable to complete a PhD having shrunk considerably in recent years (J. White, 2013). Not only are students now expected to finish more quickly, they are also encouraged to publish more, and produce outputs that have a higher measurable ‘impact’ both for the development of CVs and the
prestige and funding this can bring to their institutions (see Aitchison, Kamler, & Lee, 2010; Aitchison & Mowbray, 2015; Kamler, 2008; Marchant, Anastasi, & Miller, 2011; McGrail, Rickard, & Jones, 2006). The heightened concern with regard to productivity has, in turn, led to increased regulation and the growing surveillance of doctoral students. Within a higher education environment that is characterised by competitiveness and intensification, and where the doctoral body is expected to be more productive, more quickly, it may not surprise us that some bodies become singled out as ‘unfit’ to write a dissertation. If the obese PhD applicant lacks ‘the willpower to stop eating carbs’, their will to write or research can also be called into question. Arguably, Miller’s tweet is further evidence of the surveillance of the productivity of doctoral students, however in this case surveillance begins at the admissions gate and is of the size of their bodies.

The sad irony here is that, if anything, the attitudes that might hamper fat students from pursuing a doctoral education would be those espoused in Miller’s own tweet. As Critical Fat Studies researchers have illuminated, the anti-fat attitudes the tweet reproduces generate challenging higher education climates for fat people to navigate (Pausé, 2014). Indeed, while Miller’s tweet is one case that arose to media prominence, there is evidence that it sits inside a wider pattern of weight discrimination within higher education. For example, Canning and Mayer (1966, 1967) found that despite similar high school performances, ‘obese’ students were less likely to be accepted to elite universities than their non-obese peers. In a more recent US-based study, Burmeister and colleagues (2013) found evidence of weight bias in graduate school admissions. In particular, they found that higher body mass index (BMI) applicants received fewer post-interview offers into psychology graduate programmes than other
students (p. 920), and this relationship appeared to be stronger for women applicants (p. 920). This picture is supported by a study by Swami and Monk (2013), who examined weight bias against women in a hypothetical scenario about university acceptance. In this study, 198 volunteers in the UK were asked to identify the women they were most and least likely to select for a place at university. Swami and Monk (2013) found that participants were biased against fat women, a finding which the authors connected to broader beliefs about whose body is (not) assumed to be fitting for higher study.

In order to write this chapter, I collected a large number of media texts surrounding the Miller case. Reading across these texts I observed that most commentators associated the tweet with a particular affective formation – shame. Miller’s actions were widely described as ‘fat-shaming’ (Bennett-Smith, 2013; Ingeno, 2013; Martin, 2013; Trotter, 2013; Walsh, 2013) with Miller often referred to simply as the ‘fat-shaming professor’ (King, 2013; Thinktank, 2013; Plott, 2013). Here, I want to consider the broad affective-political dimensions of Miller’s tweet, by focusing on one digital community’s response to it entitled: *Fuck Yeah! Fat PhDs*. In following this path I am building on the work of other researchers who have considered fat activisms and Web 2.0 (Pausé, 2015); fat visual activism (Guerrieri, 2013); and the emotional politics of fat acceptance blogging (Kargbo, 2013; Bronstein, 2015). I want to illustrate how the visual activism of this online community works to contest the shame that Miller’s tweet sticks to fat doctoral bodies.

*Fuck Yeah! Fat PhDs*
By 3 June 2013 – just one day after Miller’s tweet was published – New Zealand-based academic Cat Pausé had created the Tumblr *Fuck Yeah! Fat PhDs*. This was billed as a photo-blog about ‘being fatlicious in academia’. Writing on her *Friend of Marilyn* blog, Pausé (2013) explained the rationale behind the Tumblr:

I decided that what I wanted to do was to highlight all the amazing fat individuals who are in graduate school, or have completed graduate school – to provide a visual repository … and to celebrate the amazing work being done by these rad fatties!

Pausé sent out calls for participants on Twitter, Tumblr and Facebook, and emailed a Fat Studies listserv. She asked submitters to send ‘a photo, along with their name, degree, and awarding institution’ (Pausé, 2015, p. 6). Images were submitted thick and fast. Twenty-three were published in the first day of the project, and 20 in the second. At the time of writing, over 160 images had been submitted, the most recent being November 2013.

The *Fuck Yeah! Fat PhDs* project ought to be understood as part of the turn away from the textual toward the digital in fat activist movements (Kargbo, 2013). This has seen a growth in online communities that are interested in developing ‘counter-images in response to the fat body’s position as the abject, excluded Other of the socially acceptable body’ (Kargbo, 2013, p. 162). Examples include a multitude of Fatshion photo-blogs, Tumblrs like *Exciting Fat People* or the *Stocky Bodies* image library, which responds to the limited diversity of visual representations of fat people in the mainstream media (Guerrieri, 2013).

For this chapter, I treated visual data on the *Fuck Yeah! Fat PhDs* Tumblr much like other kinds of qualitative data. My goal in analysing the data-set was to gain
an impression about the affective-political work accomplished by this collective of self-identified fat academic bodies. I began to interpret the images by reading through the tumblr multiple times, taking notes on my initial sense of common themes across the images, and also pictures that appeared incongruous. I then developed a spreadsheet and generated initial codes. In order to code the images, I created labels to describe what segments of the data were about (e.g. ‘wearing graduation regalia’, or ‘eating/drinking’). Prevalence was determined by item (i.e. if there were two graduates eating in one photo, this was counted twice). Once I had coded the dataset, I began searching for themes among the codes. A ‘theme’ is something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents ‘some kind of patterned response or meaning within the dataset’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82).

As I indicated earlier, much of the commentary following Miller’s tweet characterised it as an attempt to ‘shame’ fat doctoral students. As Elspeth Probyn has identified, shame frequently manifests itself on the body: ‘most experiences of shame make you want to disappear, to hide away and to cover yourself’ (2004, p. 329). I suggest that the core work of the Fuck Yeah! Fat PhDs Tumblr is to address the spectre of shame projected by Miller’s tweet with visibility, which in turn enables the project to proliferate a host of different ways of (feeling about) being fat and doctoral. Following my analysis, I identified two main themes: ‘successful, fat, doctoral graduates’ and ‘against stereotypical representations’, which I will explain in the sections that follow.

**Successful, fat, doctoral graduates**
The first image posted on the Tumblr is Pausé’s own\(^{42}\) (Figure 7). She is pictured smiling at the 2007 graduation ceremony where she received her own PhD, surrounded by fellow graduates in academic regalia. Her image is followed by many others, mostly white women, who attest to the academic attainments of fat individuals. My first impression as I scrolled through the Tumblr was to note that many of the images (51) referenced scenes of graduation, where subjects wore robes, caps or posed with higher degree certificates. Many more were the kinds of photographs that one might expect to be taken at an academic event. Together, these images attest to the viability of the living, breathing and graduating doctoral body, a particularly relevant response given Miller’s tweet. This work to legitimate the fat doctoral body was also accomplished through the submission of two historical photographs of Albert Einstein, a figure who is neither living nor breathing, but highly unlikely to be described as lacking academic ability or willpower.

**Against stereotypical representations**

As I read through the Tumblr several times, I noticed that many of the submitters offered images that challenge stereotypical representations of the fat body. As a number of writers have noted, fat people tend to be visually represented as ‘solitary, lonely figures whose expressions are downcast and dejected’ (Guerrieri, 2013, p. 202). That is if they aren’t already decapitated in the visual convention of the ‘headless fatty’ used across news media (Kargbo, 2013, p. 160). Like the *Stocky Bodies* project, the *Fuck Yeah! Fat PhDs* Tumblr facilitated a more diverse and less pathologising representation of fat (doctoral) embodiment.

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\(^{42}\) I thank each of the people pictured for their permission to use these photographs.
FIGURE 7. Dr. Cat Pausé
FIGURE 8 Dr. Jenny Lee
While Miller’s tweet seems to invite shame of aspiring fat doctoral candidates, across the images there is little evidence of the downcast eyes, ‘head down, fingers covering…face’ (Probyn, 2004, p. 345) that are its ‘classic facial displays’ (p. 345). Scrolling through the Tumblr, one encounters images of fat people singing, swimming, creating art, playing sport, smoking, smiling, dressing up, and making music. A number of images (12) emphasise the social nature of fat doctoral life, by picturing multiple subjects at once, some holding hands, others posing with colleagues, loved ones, and a puppy. Another category of submissions took a playful stance vis-à-vis some representational conventions of imaging fatness. Where portrayals of the fat body from side or rear angles, or images of fat people eating and drinking, typically code an affective scene of disgust (Guerrieri, 2013), a number of images on the Tumblr appear to reinscribe these scenes with new meaning. Viewers are offered pictures of smiling and contented fat graduates unashamed to eat and drink (Figure 8), or be represented from “unflattering” angles. Furthermore, a number of images offered alternatives to the conventional representation of the fat subject as ugly and sexually unattractive by posing in glamorous shots bubbling with allure and desire. In one memorable picture, blogger and educator Virgie Tovar (Figure 9) is snapped wearing a ‘sex instructor’ badge and laughs while holding two sex toys.

Reading across the images, I argue that the Tumblr offers a response to the visual convention of representing the solitary and dejected fat person. Rather than presenting isolated fat doctoral students, the act of holding the images together generates a sense of fat higher education community, as Kargbo (2013) notes:

a single image posted online amidst vast Internet ephemera is just a fleeting document of a moment in a stranger’s life. But in the plural, as
one scrolls through hundreds of images eager to hit the “next” button for what will be a repetition of the same, the image takes on a new function: it becomes an insistent testament to the liveness of fat embodiment in the present. (p. 164)

Put another way, the images renegotiate the figure of the obese doctoral student as lacking ‘will’. The Tumblr presents a community of obese doctoral students who are wilful, or full of disobedient will (Ahmed, 2014). Obesity Timebomb blogger Charlotte Cooper (2013) commented on the significance of the project: ‘It is pretty amazing to see the names and faces as I scroll through Fuck yeah! Fat PhDs. Many of us are friends and collaborators and the site represents a new community of power’ (para. 8).

Fat embodiment and higher education cultures

This chapter has examined a cultural event that saw the figure of the fat doctoral student rise to international media prominence in 2013. I have argued that while Miller’s tweet can be read as illustrative of the affective scene of shame that surrounds the fat body in higher education, the images offered by the Fuck Yeah! photo submitters work to visually re-negotiate implication in social discourses of abjection, by emphasising the viability and diversity of fat doctoral experience. I am in agreement with Kargbo (2013) when she argues that fat photo-blogs ‘have the potential to alter the conditions of visual reception and perception’ (p. 169). That is, through their ‘codes and conventions, styles of lighting and modes of address, photographs literally show us how to relate to another person’ (Singer, 2013, p. 602). When read together, the Fuck Yeah! images insist that a different kind of relationship to fat PhDs is possible, one that exceeds the shaming visible in Miller’s tweet. The corporeal ‘work’ of the subjects in the images
FIGURE 9. Virgie Tovar
communicates affects that may be rendered absent in conventional accounts of fatness in educational contexts – which tend to know fat only as a problem.

Critics might argue that this Tumblr is not particularly novel when set in the context of a range of fat photo-blogs that have sprung up across the Internet in recent years. I would argue, however, that when we consider the kinds of questions *Fuck Yeah! Fat PhDs* might ask of university cultures, and the prompts it offers to higher education researchers, the Tumblr can be seen to make an important contribution. The images assert that alternative ways of feeling about being fat and doctoral remain possible. Fat students can be contented, ambivalent, sultry, pissed off, passionate and proud – and *Fuck Yeah! Fat PhDs* provides submitters with a platform to perform a wide array of these affects. This is not to say that shame is shut out of the project, or the lives of submitters’ altogether. Instead, I am suggesting that the Tumblr generates a more open field of possibilities, providing ‘a space for re-imagining new forms of attachments and identifications.’ (Kargbo, 2013, p. 171). Ultimately then, the Tumblr is a call to take fat doctoral students seriously, *not* as problems in need of fixing, but as a diverse group of scholars who make important contributions to the academy and beyond.

**What is queer about *Fuck Yeah! Fat PhDs***?

The *Fuck Yeah!* photo-blog may be interpreted as evidence of a queer(y)ing of the affective-political terms of doctoral embodiment by its work to denaturalise the slender doctoral body. Such an argument echoes the work of writers such as Longhurst (2014), who has identified that ‘slimmed bodies are... represented as
the unremarked norm from which other body shapes and sizes are seen [as] a derivative’ (p. 22). In contrast *Fuck Yeah! Fat PhDs* offers possibilities for:

‘un-fixing’ body shape and size which has potentially liberating effects. Queering body size and shape – that is, understanding and accepting a diverse range of perpetually shifting corporeal forms – can open up psychological, discursive and material space for appreciating a wider range of bodies than just a select few (Longhurst, 2014, p. 23).

Similarly, Wykes (2014) argues that ‘non-normative bodies challenge and disrupt – that is to say, queer – the disciplinary power of normative categories’ (p. 5), in this case the category of ‘unviable’ doctoral embodiment.

In addition to queer(y)ing the norms of doctoral embodiment, this analysis also calls us to reconsider assumptions about the political valence of affects. While it is clear that shame can have harmful effects, such as causing hurt, and contributing to isolation, I also want to consider the productive possibilities it can facilitate (Probyn, 2004). For example, shame can be returned to its source, that is, to say: ‘No. Shame on *you*!’ as many of the media responses to Miller’s tweet did. Importantly, shame can also function as a catalyst for action and a call for community. The fat-shaming tweet created the conditions for what Cooper (2013) called a ‘community of power’ (para. 8) that arose in response to discourses of social abjection. Much like the route travelled by LGBT Pride, Black Pride and other social movements, the public formed out of fat shame came together in order to engender and circulate the other ways of feeling about being fat and doctoral. While the norms of doctoral embodiment may be queered in this case, I am less certain that the same can be said for the affective-political tactics employed. The route from shame to pride and visibility is one that is habitually travelled by critical political activists. In this sense then, I think this
my analysis of *Fuck Yeah! Fat PhDs* illustrates a queer tension that I am negotiating throughout this thesis. Arguably, the case offers an insight of what queer concepts can do when applied to considerations of the normative doctoral body, yet my analysis here also foregrounds community efforts to promote pride to be an affective-political norm.
FIGURE 10. Lucy’s ‘real’ writing experience
CHAPTER 6

THE TROUBLE WITH DOCTORAL ASPIRATION NOW

This chapter is an attempt to understand why, present context considered, so many students retain attachments to the doctorate, and often harbour fantasies of an academic future. It begins by examining the depressed scene that academic work projects for doctoral students, noting the intensified conditions of doctoral education, transformations to academic work and widespread anxiety about the possibility of post-doctoral academic careers (Barcan, 2013, Kamler & Thomson, 2014). After painting a rather bleak picture of the conditions for contemporary doctoral aspiration, I explore the ways that students in my study spoke about their own attachments to it. In particular I identify three conventional fantasies that students appeared to project onto doctoral education in their talk: social mobility, job security and a place of ‘retreat’ away from more stressful forms of work. The remainder of the chapter is concerned with trying to understand the disjuncture between gloomy public accounts of doctoral aspiration, and students’ enduring attachments to it. Following Lauren Berlant (2011a), I examine the affective structure of optimism, discerning the ways it can work to bind subjects to their fantasies of the future. The chapter uses Berlant’s ‘cruel optimism’ (2011a) as a lens to understand why it is so challenging for students to re-mold existing attachments to the PhD.

Academic aspiration in a precarious time

In the early 21st century practices and meanings of higher education (HE) are under considerable pressure. Higher education was once imagined as a public
good⁴³ and has now become steadily re-imagined as a commodity, ‘an individual’s personal investment – even a speculation on his or her personal future’ (Rustin, 2010, para. 4). While universities do retain features of their social mission and sense of scholarly community, some of these are ‘colliding’ (Barcan, 2013, p. 42) with corporate values, such as ‘competitiveness, performance and profitability’ (Courtois & O'Keefe, 2015, p. 44). Nowadays, concern about the soul of the university centers around a creeping sense that universities are called to behave more like ‘transnational corporations competing in the global market for the provision of commercial educational services’ (Shore, 2010, p. 7), than institutions that attract public investment for the social good.

Unsurprisingly, these pressures have had impacts on the nature of academic work. While particular enactments are varied geographically and by institution, an increasing number of scholars have identified ‘precariousness’ as a defining trend in contemporary academic life (Callinicos, 2006; Gill, 2010). A growing number of accounts emerging across the globe echo this theme: (Bauder, 2006; Bousquet, 2002; Courtois & O'Keefe, 2015; Nöbauer, 2012; Ryan, Burgess, Connell, & Groen, 2013; Shelton et al., 2001). Whereas academics have traditionally enjoyed comparatively high status and rather privileged conditions of work, higher education researchers have begun to describe a scene of ‘depreciation’ (Bauder, 2006, p. 229). The newly corporate university has enacted reforms in accordance with its business models, resulting in an ‘onslaught’ of managerialist practices (Larner & Le Heron, 2005). The list of challenges this

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⁴³ However, scholars working from within critical race, feminist, class, indigenous, and/or ability studies paradigms would rightly question the straightforwardness of this claim. As Barcan (2013) notes universities have never been ‘unequivocal exemplum of or vehicle for social progressivism’ (p. 55), in the ‘good old days’ the ‘public’ served by universities was disproportionately comprised of wealthy white men.
presents for many academic workers is long, and lengthening: intensified work, less autonomy and more surveillance (Sparkes, 2007), limited job security (Ryan et al., 2013), stagnant wages (Courtois & O’Keefe, 2015), austere budgets (Hey, 2011), high faculty-student ratios (Bauder, 2006) and a relative ‘erosion’ of status (Clegg, 2013, p. 75). Increasingly academics are depicted as ‘under the pump’ (Allen & Rasmussen, 2015, p. 692) and ‘overworked and stressed’ (Curtis & Matthewman, 2005, p. 10). Many describe the academic workplace as having a background mood of disappointment (Pelias, 2004; Sparkes, 2007), where academics are discovering ‘that the university life was not what they expected or bargained for’ (Pelias, 2004, p. 10).

Increasingly then, academic workers in well-off societies might be seen to be catching up with those in other service industries where insecure labour has long been a norm. However, working conditions vary throughout the sector. The burden of vulnerability appears to be unequally distributed along axes of gender and class (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Callinicos, 2006; Hey, 2001; Ivancheva, 2015; Probert, 2005), for example. It is also, to some extent, held in specific concentrations in the workforce, in what Connell (2013a) describes as the evolution of a ‘two-tier’ labour system. Tier one is a ‘growing casualised teaching-only sector, increasingly doing work that used to be done by tenured lecturers’ (p. 107), and tier two is a ‘privileged sector with tenure…research opportunities and promotion paths’ (Connell, 2013a, p. 107). The first tier is what some are now calling the academic precariat, ‘a reserve army of workers with ever shorter, lower paid, hyper-flexible contracts and ever more temporally fragmented and geographically hyper-mobile lives’ (Ivancheva, 2015, p. 39). The phenomenon of precarious academic work has generated some evocative description. For example, Courtois and O’Keefe (2015) ask if the ivory tower has
in fact become an ‘ivory cage’, where academics work inside a ‘hamster wheel of precarity’ (Courtois & O’Keefe, 2015, p. 43). Reporting from an Irish study, they quote one participant who describes the academy as a ‘pyramid scheme’ ‘with little scope for upward mobility and instead the constant fear of being downgraded to a lower level’ (Courtois & O’Keefe, 2015, p. 59). Another describes doing a PhD as having ‘irremediably destroyed their chances of achieving a decent standard of living or their personal life goals’ (p. 60). Reading across these accounts, there is a sense that academia has entered a state of ‘deep, affective, somatic crisis’ (Burrows, 2012, p. 355) where work and life are seriously imbalanced.

At the same time as this troubling picture of academic life and labour is emerging, something interesting is happening: doctoral enrolment is growing. Internationally, there has been an acceleration in the numbers of doctoral enrolments, and the number of degrees being awarded annually (The Group of Eight, 2013). Across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), this rose 38% from 154,000 new graduates in the year 2000 to 213,000 in 2009 (Auriol, Misu, & Freeman, 2013, p. 6). While some paint a rosy picture of doctoral futures, emphasising the continued comparative premium on doctoral education (Auriol et al., 2013, p. 12), there is still an acknowledgement that doctoral students of today are disproportionately affected by insecurity in comparison to previous generations of graduates. Disappointment lurks in seemingly benign descriptions of changes to ‘the structure of labour markets and the organisation of research systems’, with ‘traditional linear research career paths giving way to a diverse range of career experiences’ (Auriol et al., 2013, p.

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44 Even the production of this text is revealing. Somewhat tragi-comically, this sentence was written while I was at work on Asanha Bucha Day, a public holiday here in Thailand.
22). The fact remains, these ‘diverse range’ of career experiences may now include exploitative forms of labour such as ‘non-stipendiary’ academic internships (Calkin, 2013).

Despite the swell of interest in tracking precariousness, declining working conditions and their affective consequences for academics, significantly less has been published in the research literature about the trouble all of this might cause for those who desire to join the ranks of the academy (for exceptions, see Badenhorst & Guerin, 2016; Lolich & Lynch, 2016). However, as I have suggested in previous chapters, doctoral study may no longer feel like it used to, either. A picture is emerging of doctoral students who are ‘sore, stressed, and feeling disappointed, anxious and guilty’ (Burford, 2014a, p. 69), with writing in particular emerging as a ‘swirling affective soup, involving feelings of engulfment, anxiety, fear and frustration’ (Burford, 2014a, p. 76). In order to explore this further, I will take one recent column in The Guardian newspaper on the ‘PhD problem’ as an example. I have selected it not for its exceptionality, rather because it is illustrative of a wider body of popular commentary. In the anonymously authored piece entitled So many students, so few jobs (2014), we discover that the academic job market is ‘incredibly tough’: there is a ‘dire shortage’ of entry-level positions and a ‘flood’ of ‘hopeful would-be academics’, fighting ‘tooth and nail’ to take them.

45 See for example: Else’s (2015) column ‘Too many PhDs not enough tenured positions’ in Times Higher Education, Gould’s (2015) article ‘How to build a better PhD’ in Nature, or Bousquet’s (2015) article entitled ‘Moving the goalposts in graduate education’. All of these pieces of popular commentary identify an oversupply of doctorate holders and ensuing unemployment, dissatisfaction and stress. Some pieces go further, for example a 2010 column from The Economist describes the PhD bluntly as a ‘waste of time’.
It is useful to pause to consider the flood for a minute – ‘floods’ and ‘drowning’ are two metaphors that researchers have used to evoke features of the academic present (Gill, 2010, p. 228; Sparkes, 2007, p. 524). In describing a ‘flood’ of doctoral students, immediately the current context of doctoral aspiration is framed as a crisis, an emergency. But this is not a crisis that has emerged out of nowhere. It is a ‘regime of crisis ordinariness’ (Berlant, 2011a, p. 117), a disaster of the day-to-day. In this flood-scenario, doctoral students become mere drops in an ocean of would-be academic workers. But these doctoral droplets aren’t just aimlessly sloshing about. Like academics, doctoral students are enjoined to become more ‘entrepreneurial, individualistic and competitive’ (Shore, 2007, p. 9) to ensure their success in ‘the market’. We see them fighting ‘tooth and nail’, that is fiercely and with all one’s might for an available spot. Here the doctoral student is doubly constituted, both as vulnerable to the devastation of the flood, and as the flood itself. If we allow our thinking to flow with the flood, we might consider its consequences: some people may be stranded, some may die, others lose everything. And after? There isn’t much to do but to survey the field of wreckage, add up losses, and pick up the pieces of our lives. Indeed, the column concludes in this vein. In neoliberal times there not being enough jobs is ‘just one of those things’ – the impasse is what it is. The only advice to give is: ‘keep trying’ and you might ‘get lucky’ (Anonymous, 2014).

The core purpose of this chapter is to explain the seeming incongruity between pervasive gloomy accounts of academic life, and doctoral students’ continuing attachments to it. I wish to understand how, affectively speaking, students

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46 I am wary of overstating the gloominess of this picture. For many, the university does remain a dynamic workplace where the ‘pleasures and privileges of academic life continue, even if they are rather more precarious than was once the case and are unevenly distributed across the academic workforce’ (Barcan, 2013, p. 5).
respond to the problem of doctoral aspiration now, that is, why they maintain attachments to the PhD at a time where we continually hear (at least in the Global North\textsuperscript{47}) that there may be ‘no future’ in academic work. Many would explain this endurance by noting the ‘time, effort and money’ (Bauder, 2006, p. 232) that students devote to a lengthy PhD programme, and their desire not to forfeit their ‘investments’. This is, however, not the only available explanation for the endurance of doctoral aspiration. To pursue this argument in isolation would be to limit our understandings of the PhD student as an ‘economic actor’ who makes calculated investment decisions about education, and a sovereign subject who is ‘in control of her desires’ (Cvetkovich, 2012b, p. 167). In this chapter I am arguing that in order to understand doctoral aspiration, higher education researchers need more analytic tools than economic rationality alone. We need to consider the complex ‘affective bindings’ (Gill & Pratt, 2008, p. 15) of doctoral desire, to understand that ‘psychic investments are not rational and self-calculating but operate in a realm that is felt’ (Blackman, 2009, p. 123). Such a point of departure, I argue, will help us to develop more comprehensive accounts of doctoral aspiration, including accounts of aspirational practices that appear contradictory or incoherent when viewed through a rational economic lens.

**Feeling precarity**

This chapter responds to Rasmussen’s critique that higher education researchers currently ‘lack the theoretical and interdisciplinary resources’ to ‘apprehend

\textsuperscript{47} It is important to note that this discussion is set in the Global North. In the Global South there are reports of high demand for doctoral graduates

relations between bodies and discourses’ (Allen & Rasmussen, 2015, p. 692). It seeks to extend recent work from authors who are curious about the role of emotions, affect and bodies in higher education (Clegg, 2013; Elizabeth & Grant, 2013; Grant & Elizabeth, 2014; Hey, 2011; Leathwood & Hey, 2009; Lynch, 2010). These scholars have persuasively argued that emotions, by virtue of their social and relational nature, are always-already in the political realm. This means that exploring practices of affect can be extremely helpful in apprehending the dynamics of contemporary higher education’s precarious scene, that is, how vulnerable work and living is increasingly becoming par for the course of life.

My contribution to this earlier higher education research is to draw into the discussion a body of work that has emerged out of social psychology and cultural studies (Berlant, 2011a; Wetherell, 2012). This work has contested the proposition that emotions are psychological states that begin within the interior of individuals and then express themselves out via the body. To the contrary, as Ahmed (2004) has argued, ‘emotions do things’ creating ‘the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds’ (p. 117). This understanding takes us to a different analytic place, where people are viewed as constantly enmeshed in affect-worlds, ‘continuously busy judging their environments and responding to the atmospheres in which they find themselves’ (Berlant, 2011a, p. 15). This ‘shared, not solitary’ (Berlant, 2011a, p. 15) vision of emotion and affect provides helpful tools for researchers interested in tracing the ways the historical present is ‘manufactured and endured’ (Chuh, 2013, para. 7). It allows us to think about the ways ‘interweaving patterns often form affective ruts’ (Wetherell, 2012, p. 14) or contextually located ‘structures of feeling’ (Williams, 1977; Blackman 2009). By accepting that affective patterns can be drawn together, higher education researchers are encouraged to think differently. For example, we might ask
ourselves whether grooves ‘have been cut in the social psychological life’ (Wetherell, 2012, p. 14) of academia or if there is some form of ‘shared nervous system in this time of surviving neo-liberalism’ (Lather, 2013, p. 640).

For the purposes of this chapter, some of the most useful work on the affective scene of the political present has been produced by researchers drawing on queer concepts (Ahmed, 2004b; Berlant, 2011a; Brennan, 2004; Cvetkovich, 2002, 2012b; Love, 2007; Munt, 2007; Muñoz, 2009; Ngai, 2005; Probyn, 2005; Stockton, 2006). In the first place, writers drawing on queer concepts have tended to question normative accounts of the value of emotions. While critical political convention tends to hold some emotions as ‘positive’ and ‘productive’ and others as ‘negative’ and politically suspicious – queer theorists have offered more nuanced accounts. Increasingly, queer work has foregrounded the possibilities of working with ‘negative’ affects, rather than refusing, or seeking to transform them (Cvetkovich, 2003; Halberstam, 2008; Halperin & Traub, 2009; Love, 2007). As Cvetkovich (2012b) puts it, the goal of this work is to ‘depathologize negative feelings so that they can be seen as a possible resource for political action rather than as its antithesis’ (p. 2). Secondly, and most importantly for this chapter, researchers drawing on queer concepts have posed questions about the ‘normalization of neoliberal precarity’ (Puar, 2012, p. 165). They have asked how and why these norms are reproduced, looking to the governing effects of attachments to conventionality – to norms of a predictable life (Berlant, 2011a). This chapter has been shaped by a concern to apprehend norms of doctoral aspiration and to think about their relation to affects such as optimism. It responds to the invitations of queer scholars of education who have called for researchers in education to ‘palpate queer concepts’ – such as Berlant’s ‘cruel optimism’ – in order to consider questions, such as precarity, in educational contexts
(Rasmussen & Allen, 2014, p. 434). I suggest that this kind of queer thinking might help us to understand often ‘incoherent’ projections onto the doctorate, and the ‘affective sense’ that shapes doctoral student’s enduring attachments to it. First, in the section that follows, I will outline the design of this study.

**Methodological framework**

The core purpose of this chapter is to offer a queer theoretical reading of doctoral aspiration, by way of Berlant’s analytic framework, as described in Cruel Optimism (2011a). However, by reporting on the design of this study I am also in a position to advance accounts about specific qualitative research methods, and their application in higher education studies. In particular, this chapter: a) extends accounts of participant-solicited visual research in higher education studies (Cousin, 2009; Metcalfe, 2012, 2015, 2016), and b) introduces a novel research method: the residential writing retreat.

The research upon which this chapter is based was conducted at a research-intensive university in Aotearoa-New Zealand between February-June 2013. It involved ten doctoral students, all of whom were connected to Faculties of Arts and Education, and at various stages of their degrees. I recruited students in the arts, social sciences and education, as research suggests that students in these disciplines experience high rates of attrition (Owler, 2010) and comparatively high rates of unemployment post-graduation (Auriol et al., 2013). The study was sparked by a gut feeling that something interesting might happen if empirical material on doctoral education’s affective-political landscape was available for analysis. While commentaries have been offered about what it feels like to do a doctoral degree in the present climate (Bansel, 2011; Prasad, 2013; Raineri, 2013, 2015; Thatcher, 2012), often these have been incidental rather than central to a
formal research project. I designed this study with the emotional and political context of doctoral education at the core.

The study involved two sets of methods, both of which I draw on in this chapter. The first comprised a form of diary-interview technique (Spowart & Nairn, 2014; Toms & Duff, 2002), which involved an initial meeting, followed by a period of independent diary-based data collection, and a follow-up in-depth interview. The second set of methods was conducted at a three-day residential retreat held at a rural location north of Auckland. While there are a number of published studies about the use of retreats as writing interventions for academics or postgraduate students (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009; Grant, 2006; Grant & Knowles, 2000; Moore, 2003; Murray & Newton, 2009; Singh, 2012), to date I have been unable to find any published studies which have used residential retreats as a part of the design for a broader higher education research project. In this case, the residential retreat was used as a container to extend opportunities for contact with participants. It allowed me to participate in and observe doctoral socialisation over a longer period of time. The retreat programme was inspired by Grant’s ‘Women Writing Away’ model (2008) and adapted for this study with a series of arts-based research activities, group and pair discussions, as well as personal writing time. For the purposes of this chapter, I will draw on data generated in the two visual arts-based activities held at the retreat on days one and two, respectively (highlighted in Table 2).

The arts-based activity on day one provided the doctoral students with a range of materials: crayons, paints, newspapers, magazines, university-related pamphlets, and plain paper. I asked them to represent something about their experience during or after their personal writing at the retreat. The pictures
produced by students have been reproduced throughout this thesis. They ranged from landscape portraits with oil paints, to a collage made with phrases cut out of a newspaper, and a series of vibrant images made with pastels. The art-making activity on day two was conducted with the same materials as the day before. During this activity I asked students to select a piece of paper and fold it in half. On one half students were invited to represent an ‘ideal’ image of the doctoral student/writer, on the other their ‘real’ doctoral experience. After each of these art-making processes, students participated in group discussions which focused on the meanings embedded in the drawings. These discussions lasted around 30-45 minutes, and were audio-recorded. Across both of these days a total of 18 visual artefacts were collected. In this chapter, I will analyse three self-portraits created across both days, in conjunction with verbal and written data generated in the semi-structured interviews and diaries.

Before I interpret what the students’ visual texts might teach us about the felt experience of being doctoral now, I want to begin by illustrating the ways that participants spoke about the ‘cluster of promises’ that they want the doctorate to ‘make to [them] and make possible for [them]’48. What I am seeking do in the section which follows is to read their diaries and interview accounts, in order to build a picture of conventional aspirations to doctoral study.

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48 While these projections certainly circulate in institutional branding and marketing, which associate the university with the ‘good life’ (Gottschall & Saltmarsh, 2016), they are seldom uttered as promises by higher education institutions explicitly.
TABLE 2: Indicative retreat Programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regular activities</th>
<th>DAY 1</th>
<th>Programme activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrival, setting up writing spaces</td>
<td>11:00 AM</td>
<td>I: Quiet writing time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch, introductions of selves &amp; projects, programme overview</td>
<td>12:30 PM</td>
<td>II: Group art-making; Reflecting on our writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pot-luck dinner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of day</td>
<td>8:30 PM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAY 2</td>
<td>7:00 AM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>8:00 AM</td>
<td>I: Quiet writing time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>12:30 PM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinner</td>
<td>6:00 PM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of day</td>
<td>8:30 PM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAY 3</td>
<td>7:00 AM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>8:00 AM</td>
<td>I: Quiet writing time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>12:30 PM</td>
<td>IV: Peer review of drafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pack up and wrap up</td>
<td>2:30 PM</td>
<td>V: Reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of day, transport back to city</td>
<td>3:30 PM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: There are five types of programme activities (I: Quiet writing time, II: Group art-making, III: Work-in-progress presentations, IV: Pair activities, and V: Reflection)
‘Why this attachment’? PhDs & ‘The Academic Good Life’

In a 2013 piece entitled ‘on (not) mentoring’, English Professor Kandice Chuh reflects on her experience working with graduate students. Her essay takes as its focus the ‘attachments and fantasies’ (para. 4) that drive the politically-engaged in/to the university. According to Chuh (2013), the ‘fantasy that academia is the good life for the unconventional or counterhegemonic (anti-racist, queer, feminist, and so on) subject is powerful’ (para. 8). While she notes that the act of applying (to a PhD programme, for example) is itself optimistic, there remains the task of ‘sussing out’ the conditions ‘within which the university itself takes priority as object of discourse’ (Chuh, 2013, para. 4). Chuh identifies that optimistic relations to the fantasy of the ‘academic good life’ for ‘minority discourse practitioners’ often congeal around a several projections. Over and above the ‘very conventional material needs of housing, food and so on’, Chuh spots two other key elements, that: ‘knowledge work is related to and can transform the world at large’ and the university might provide a ‘refuge for non-normativity’. While in this chapter I focus on the aspirations of a broader constituency within the doctoral community, I think Chuh’s (2013) questions offer some helpful points of departure here. She asks us to consider: ‘Why this attachment? How, in this context, do we relate to aspirations to academia?’ (para. 4).

In searching for a response to these questions I returned to earlier work on doctoral fantasy (Johnson, Lee, & Green, 2000; Riemer, 1998). While there are plenty of historical accounts of fantasies of the Oxbridge-esque ‘scholars’ life’ with promises of walks ‘among the dreaming spires’ (Riemer, 1998, cited in Johnson & colleagues, 2000, p. 1), there appear to be limited published accounts
about ‘the deep investments in, and attachments to’ (Johnson, Lee & Green, 2000, p. 136) the contemporary doctorate. As I began reading through the interview transcripts and diaries generated by this study, I was struck by the distribution of particular doctoral fantasies. In particular, I discerned three interconnected ways that the doctoral students’ talk resonated with Chuh’s question: ‘why this attachment?’ These were desires for well-being projected onto the doctorate, and centred on conventional fantasies of: social mobility, job security and a place of ‘retreat’ away from more stressful forms of work.

That these three elements of doctoral aspiration appeared across interviews and diary entries is unlikely to surprise us. As Jakobsen (2013) notes, the academy has long made promises of ‘all kinds of movement and progress’ (para. 4). This was evident in the account of ‘John’, one of the participants in this study. John narrated his doctoral story by contrasting it to his family’s more precarious economic position in his home country, and their lower levels of educational attainment. He described his parents’ encouragement of his ambition to study: ‘my parents often, well, not expect me to be a high achiever, but I don’t how they do that, but they successfully made all their children feel they have to be a high achiever’. By setting high goals, John described his family culture as encouraging him to ‘always feel hungry for achievement’. But John acknowledged that his ‘ambitious self’ had limitations, and noted that in recent years he was trying harder to ‘take care’ of himself, and to be more ‘gentle’. For John, among other things, the international PhD represented a route to accrue esteem and social capital. This was especially clear in his talk about the opportunity to complete his PhD in a ‘developed’ country, like NZ. As John put it, ‘I feel like I am a young chef at a local restaurant in a developing country, then I study overseas in a world-class culinary school. In this school I tasted the best dishes from all around
the world’. John’s desire for a ‘world class’ education is one that has been identified in previous studies about international student mobility (Findlay et. al, 2012). For John, there is the desire that this international experience with the ‘top chefs’ will bring status and opportunities upon his return home to his academic position where he is bonded to work. Educational mobility through the PhD thus becomes a ladder, whereby John can acquire ‘positional advantage’ (Holloway, O’Hara & Pimlott-Wilson, 2012, p. 2279). Often those who study doctorates abroad in the Global North are rewarded with status upon their return to work in the Global South⁴⁹. International contacts and familiarity with writing in English is becoming particularly important, as John notes: ‘the government start to put pressure for academics to publish internationally, which is um, very hard....because of the academic culture, because of the language’. The international PhD becomes a way of learning how to publish or, as John says ‘to understand the publication culture, the publication language, so that when I finish I can go back there [to home country] and publish my work in the future’. Arguably, the affective practice of aspiration for social mobility that I identify in the interview is associated with other subject positions that John identifies for himself, including the ‘good boy, good student, good church goer, good family member’. One way of analysing John’s aspiration for the PhD is to see it is a form of taking responsibility – of being a ‘good boy’ – both for his own social mobility, as well as that of his partner and wider family.

Related to the dream of the PhD as a route to social mobility is the fantasy that academic work might provide a more secure place of employment. Given the disciplinary backgrounds of the students recruited for this study, it is

⁴⁹ See Connell (2013b) for further debates on academic practice and the global politics of center/periphery.
unsurprising that many came to their PhDs via the cultural and creative industries. As Gill and Pratt (2008) have noted, increasingly cultural workers are viewed as ‘the poster boys and girls of the new “precariat”’ (p. 3). Indeed, the ‘much vaunted flexibility, autonomy and informality’ (Gill & Pratt, 2008, p. 14) of creative labour has come under pressure from critics who have questioned the work/life balance of its informal, flexible, and often discontinuous employment. One participant, ‘Annie’, spoke about her hopes for doing a PhD, noting they were connected to the desire to build a more secure future for herself, her partner and ‘future children’. Annie described the arts as a ‘sector where it is like you are always on short contracts, and all contingent on how much money you can raise’, continuing:

I think there was definitely a sense for me, doing the PhD was a step towards trying to get more secure work, because I worked in the arts for 10 years, where I was fundraising for my own job at the end of every 3-year period because of how the funding works.

Annie relates working on the PhD to ‘moving forward’ in her ‘career and other life choices’. She associates finishing her thesis with aspirations of getting a ‘proper’ job, which promises more potential to support family members. Another participant, Julia, also came from a background in arts and cultural sector, which she characterised as insecure regarding income and employment. Julia spoke about aspiration to academia as related to her thoughts of becoming a parent. In our interview she explained why ‘academia appeal[ed]’ to her: ‘if I do have a family… I have always thought I would want to be in a secure job, and take

50 Gill and Pratt (2008) describe this as a neologism that ‘brings together the meanings of precariousness and proletariat to signify both an experience of exploitation and a (potential) new political subjectivity’ (p. 3)
maternity leave and then go back to my job. And I’d want to have some help at home because I am not a stay-at-home Mum kind of person.’

Another participant, ‘Timothy’, expanded upon Chuh’s (2013) description of the fantasy of the university as a ‘refuge’, describing his return to ‘varsity’ as an opportunity to ‘get out’ of a ‘pretty damn demanding’ position in the commercial sector eight years ago. During that time Timothy reported he was working ‘80-hour weeks for about seven or eight months’, this was until ‘some bad shit happened’. I asked Timothy to expand on this, and he described it as a ‘stressful situation turned nasty’, somewhat akin to workplace bullying. In addition to the ‘nasty’ situation, the ‘high stress, continual high pressure’ had ‘created anxiety, in the same way you have capital D depression, this was capital A anxiety’. All of these events led to an episode of burnout, whereas Timothy described it, overwork and pressure had ‘burned up bits of [him] that [he] used to value’. Before his negative experience in the commercial sector, Timothy described his emotional palette as that of the ‘typical Kiwi man or something’, but after this incident he became a ‘different person’, someone who was more ‘fragile’ and less able to keep his emotions ‘enclosed, or under control, or under the surface’, he added, ‘I watch afternoon cartoons and I cry at them’. Crucially, for Timothy, the university seemed to offer a ‘different environment’ to the commercial sector, and the practice of the doctorate itself promised a ‘complete change of scene’ where he might ‘re-build some of myself’.

Whereas the beginning of this chapter tracked the eroding conditions of academic labour, reading interview transcripts and diaries I was struck by the frequency with which academic aspiration was narrated using the very opposite logic. Rather than insecure and in flux, the fantasies many students came to
doctoral study with were conventional good life fantasies. These often positioned university employment as relatively ‘solid and stable’ (Barcan, 2013, p. 1); in comparison to other industries, academia was often described as a ‘real job’, or a ‘full time job’. If then, students project onto the doctorate a ‘cluster of promises’ about what an academic future might be, they seem to project onto it social mobility, security, and a higher quality of life. Yet, as we already know, all of these exist in an uneasy relationship to available information about the probabilities of these fantasies actually being realised. To put it simply, the fantasies doctoral students have may be just that. In explaining why ‘the myths of the academy’ (Adams, 2000, p. 65) might endure, Barcan (2013) wonders if some (doctoral) students are unaware:

of the extent to which the powerful modern idea of a university, and the types of practices it enabled, are under threat. So much of academic work, is after all, invisible – occurring in closed offices, at home, on planes, in meeting rooms and conferences – that it is still possible for outsiders, and even students, to imagine lecturers spend their days writing, teaching and discoursing eruditely with their colleagues (p. 3).

I would like to add that the three aspirations I have identified under the cluster of the ‘academic good life’ – social mobility, security and a refuge from stress – were not the only aspirations that could be observed in the participants’ accounts. There were other aspirations that I noticed, for example to become a ‘writer’, or a ‘professional practitioner’ or the desire to ‘make a difference’ in the world via teaching and research. My intention is neither to diminish the importance of these other aspirations in framing the story of the contemporary

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51 These fantasies appear to echo other accounts, for example Debra Erickson writing in the Chronicle of Higher Education (2015) describes fresh academic-job postings as luring ‘aspiring academics toward a future that promises intellectual fulfilment, professional respect and economic security’ (para. 1).
PhD, nor to reduce the PhD to ‘just’ a meal ticket. Instead, I have elected to focus on these three conventional projections onto the PhD because they seem so at odds with the accounts I have introduced throughout this thesis about the precariousness of academic work.

In the sections that follow, I will use Berlant’s work to help build a model to understand the endurance of this ‘cluster of promises held out by the fantasy of the good academic life’ (Chuh, 2013, para. 9). But first, rather than fantasies, it is important that we begin with some empirical ‘flesh’, in order to better understand the earlier accounts of what it feels like to be a doctoral student.

**Drawing the doctoral present**

As I outlined in the methodological section of this chapter, 18 artworks were collected at the end of the 3-day retreat during this study. I have selected three self-portraits to consider because they exemplify some of the key meanings that emerged at the retreat. My goal here is to analyse the images in conjunction with participants’ descriptions given during the writing retreat, and the wider context provided by their diary-interview. Rather than focus on the technological or compositional aspects of the images, I will place most emphasis on reading them for ‘economic, social and political relations, institutions and practices’ (Rose, 2001, p. 17). And given my interest in tracing the affective-political scene of doctoral aspiration, I have paid particular attention to this in the texts. At this point I want to repeat a couple of caveats. I do not see that it is possible to discern what the images ‘really’ signify. The interpretations I offer here are just some of many possibilities – it is not my intention to ‘finally ‘settle’ interpretation’ (Piper & Frankenham, 2007, p. 375) of the images. The second is to recall that these images were produced in a particular time and place, with an
audience (of myself and other doctoral students), which will have shaped the kinds of images students produced, and the ways they spoke about them in the group discussions that followed. In order to provide a fuller context for interpreting the images, I would like to note that in my field journal I observed that across the writing retreat the collective affect was pitched at a rather low note. I wrote that I was ‘struck by the amount that the students knew about the employment context of higher education, the PBRF\textsuperscript{52}, publications and how to get ahead in “the game”’. Afterwards, I recorded that the key themes appeared to be:

- anxiety around job prospects, the struggles to fund the PhD, the contract work and tutoring, the idea that there is no future for the PhD student, realisations that the ‘implicit contract’ of the PhD might not be met (emphasis added).

**The self-portraits of doctoral students**

Arguably, many of these themes emerge in Figure 11, which was drawn by ‘Annie’ with crayon. Annie has drawn herself in her office. She sits on a blue chair in front of her computer. Her shoulders are slouched, making her appear even smaller in comparison to the brown cubicle that seems to loom over her. A pile of books has been placed on the floor to support her legs and she tells me that her mouse is usually on the left, as she has had problems with her ‘right shoulder over these past two years and so [she is] trying to find ways to reduce the strain on it’. We can only see the back of her head. It isn’t clear whether she is sleeping, has her head in her hands, or is staring blankly at the computer screen. The monitor is black. Perhaps she turned it off, or it has gone to sleep. Whatever the case may be, it is clear is that she isn’t typing. Indeed, the computer screen is

\textsuperscript{52} PBRF is the name given to the research performance management exercise in New Zealand.
the most striking thing in front of us. It is a black whirlpool that draws the eye more than Annie does. It looks like it could suck her in. The room is dark and gloomy. We aren’t sure if this is because she is at her office late in the evening, or it has no natural light. The only features illuminated are Annie and her workstation, which she herself describes as a ‘vertical coffin’. Directly in front of her are a series of post-it notes that seem to glow with urgency. Pasted to the walls of the ‘coffin’ are two circuitous time-lines with large red gashes at the beginning, and a long to-do list, which in an earlier journal entry Annie describes as being replete with multiple chapters and publications. On top of her work desk are ‘all the books [she has] collected that the library has thrown out’. They look precariously stacked, as if they might fall on her at any minute.

The darkness that I interpret in the picture is best understood alongside details of Annie’s daily writing life. Annie recorded in her diary that the time around the retreat had been challenging. On the 28th of March 2013, Annie made an entry that sets her affective writing life in some context:

Each day I start thinking I will do more than I do. By about 11am I realise this and then I start to feel panicked and start to think of contingency plans. I want to write something beautiful. I punish myself by staying here later and trying to work longer days. Whenever anyone asks me how I am they get this look, this kind of ‘well…’ how good can I be, I’m trying to write. I get up every hour. I make tea, refill my cup, wash an apple, make lunch, photocopy, find a book, have a meeting, buy coffee….I print 20 articles and set myself a herculean task of reading them over the weekend.

Even as she writes her regular diary entries, worry is often present. For example on the 21st of February 2013, Annie writes:
FIGURE 11: Annie’s picture of ‘real’ doctoral life
As I am writing this journal entry I have bitten off three nails and run my fingers through my hair at least ten times, worrying about stress and hair-loss.

While others might be oriented to a psychological reading of Annie’s self-portrait and diary, I am more interested in seeing the gloomy affect saturating Annie’s in its wider social context. The darkness we see in the self-portrait and the anxious practices discernable in the diary may have something to do with the ‘dissolving assurances’ (Berlant, 2011a, p. 3) of the doctorate that I identified earlier. If we now accept that ‘university qualifications no longer secure a place in the elite’ (Callinicos, 2006, p. 33), we might also recognise that the doctorate may not, in fact, be the ‘step to get more secure work’ that Annie originally hoped it might be. In our interview following the retreat, Annie stated that learning about the nature of the academic job market had been ‘a huge eye opener’: it was something she ‘never picked up on in [her home country]…that sense of what it is to perform the academic in this neoliberal kind of context’. As Annie continues:

I think yeah coming here [to New Zealand] and going oh my, there is so much the emphasis on the publication record, the idea that we talked about the super human person really, and then all of that, to just get a temporary contract, or a, you know, possibly some you know, yeah, so you think bloody hell, you have to be all these things and actually what you get at the end of it, is not even a job.

Annie noted that the main constraint to her realising her aspiration to join academia would be ‘whether there are jobs that are not just casual and contract work by the time I complete my PhD’. Annie could see ‘academia changing’ and this ‘scared’ her because she worried that ‘what I am becoming will not fit the
mould of what is being looked for when I finish’. As Annie observed, these ‘changes’ were eerily similar to precarious work in the arts:

Oh god! Another sector where it is like you are always on short contracts, and all contingent on how much money you can raise, at least in the arts no one was ever measuring how many things you published or how many things you did in a year… I think oh actually I would be better off where I was in some respects.

Here, we can see Annie’s observation that the security projected onto the PhD looks more and more shaky. Living amidst this context was producing waves of different feelings for Annie. Reading across her diary I interpreted a range of feelings, but noticed the background mood was somber and sometimes tense. Indeed, occasionally the pressures of the PhD were difficult to contain, as she wrote in her diary:

Today I open the document hoping, optimistically, that inspiration will take hold and I feel so lost in the endless words, paragraphs, statements, quotes... As I read I feel a rising sense of panic, like chill and heat at the same time, the urge to get up and go somewhere else physically (flight)... as I realise that there is no inspiration ... I start to get angry at myself, I attack myself with easy weapons, being behind schedule, taking on too much other work, not being able to focus on my topic and question, always wanting to do everything, say everything... Then I channel my anger elsewhere, the noisy students who start back on the first day of semester creating queues for the toilets, I don’t have time for this! A lunch meeting my supervisor has organised, I don’t have the time! I need to write!... I find myself wanting to throw my coffee cup at the wall, I feel antagonistic to others, some one even asks me if I am alright...

If we recall that Annie’s hope was that ‘doing the PhD was a step towards trying to get more secure work’, then her panic, anger and hostility here, as well as the gloomy mood of her self-portrait, make increasing sense. Juxtaposing the
affective information from her diary and interview with the picture calls me to contemplate what it would mean to read that black hole in the computer of her image as the PhD. This would be a vision of a doctorate as a sinkhole of (potentially wasted) energy, an image that connects back to Courtois & O’Keefe’s earlier description of the potentially ‘destructive’ effects of the contemporary doctorate (2015, p. 60).

In Figure 12 ‘Gertie’ has represented her ‘real’ doctoral self as an exhausted octopus on roller-skates, who is trapped inside an enormous clock. Her hair is standing on end, her eyes have dark circles under them, and her mouth has a worried expression, as if to say ‘uh-oh’. Gertie was one of many students to draw ‘real’ doctoral life by including large or deformed clocks, and one of three students to draw what Annie described as ‘superhuman’ creatures with multiple arms. It is with these many arms that Gertie tries to balance a clothes hanger, a birthday cake, a netball, a book and flowers. She holds all of these objects at the same time as wearing roller skates which threaten to up-end her. The fullness of her home life leaves little room to engage with the books of theory that are piled at her feet. As a mature student returning to study, Gertie is particularly anxious that she has time to ‘catch up’ with all the reading that she has missed in her time away from the university. She describes herself as ‘behind on the reading, you know what I mean? Like a decade of reading could have been going on’. I interpret the clock, multiple arms, and exhaustion evident on Gertie’s face as evidence of the challenges of living a busy life with many care responsibilities, in addition to meeting the new expectations of the intensified doctorate. As we already know, the academic job market reportedly has a ‘flood’ of willing workers (Anonymous, 2014), so publication during candidacy has emerged ‘as the best known bet to secure a permanent academic position’ (Burford, 2014a, p. 60).
FIGURE 12: Gertie's picture of ‘real’ doctoral life
Gertie was already publishing at the time of our interview, but was aware that she would need to ‘ramp up all of that’. However, Gertie struggled to have ‘a bit of dedicated time’ for her thesis. She was able to write before starting work for the day and less frequently in the weekends, which involved ‘taking the girls to netball practice and fifteen thousand other things’. As she noted, it was ‘very difficult in [her] home context to explain what writing is, and you know the conditions for which it might happen’. Research on the temporalities of academia (Hartman & Darab, 2012; Shahjahan, 2015) might help us to explain the prevalence of clocks across the students’ images of doctoral life. As Shahjahan (2015) has argued, in the neoliberal academy time has colonised the body. This seems to have taken literal form in Gertie’s image. As Shahjahan continues, ‘the multiplying and endless ‘academic tasks – countless forms of assessments and a hyped up productivity schedule – engendered through neoliberal reforms propagate an ever-present “scarcity of time” affectively and cognitively’ (2015, p. 491). Within this scarce time the ‘good academic citizen’ of the neoliberal academy is supposed to ‘accumulate grants, publications, and patents, as well as to improve teaching evaluations, and structure service commitments’ (2015, p. 492). However, this pressure has impacts on academic bodies, ‘squeezing the “substance” from the lives of academics’ (Wills, 1996, p. 294). It is no wonder that Gertie looks exhausted. But these temporalities ‘may have especially exclusionary effects on particular bodies and selves’ (Shahjahan, 2015, p. 492). For instance, we might want to look closely at the apron and ‘cook’ sign on Gertie’s chest as well as the domestic responsibilities of gardening, school sports, washing, and birthday parties that are arguably indexed by the objects in her hands (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Brown & Watson, 2010). In a context where ‘hyper-competition and individualism tied to neoliberal logic constructs a hierarchy regarding the allocation of time’ (Shahjahan, 2014, p. 5) and the ‘best’
things to do are ‘those that advance one’s career and economic survival’ (Shahjahan, 2014, p. 5), these objects prompt questions about the time pressures on doctoral parents (Hook, 2015b), and the probability that such time pressures may be unequally gendered (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Hey, 2001; Maher, Ford & Thompson, 2004; Probert, 2005; Wall, 2008). What remains ambiguous is the large black circle near Gertie’s neck. It is possible that this was an error made in the production of the image that she has covered up, or it may be the centre of the clock to which the various hands are attached; equally, this could be another example of a doctoral black hole.

Exploring similar territory is Figure 13 by ‘Julia’, who used magazines and newspapers to create a collage. Julia reported that she selected the figure for her self-portrait because she looks professional and is fully clothed, in contrast to many other images of women available in the magazines provided. The most interesting parts of this image, for me, are those where Julia has used a red felt pen to colour in parts of her body, and the wrist which has been snapped in two. While ‘great things’ are supposed to be, and sometimes are happening in Julia’s PhD, she explains that she is currently living with pain as a result of overwork during her doctorate. The glowing wrist, shoulder and eyes are the parts of her body that bear the most strain. Julia reports that the final phase of her PhD has ‘physically been difficult’ and ‘draining’. While she has tried to do things like swimming and yoga to stop her becoming ‘a complete little bundle of hunched over a computer nerves’, she goes on to detail an episode of her body-in-pain that occurred about ten days before our interview:

Actually I put my neck out, I swear, while I was writing my introduction and so ... suddenly was like oh my god, I can’t even turn my head properly, and this was just a few days before I had to get my final draft
done and I am sure it’s all the tension that been in my shoulders and everything that provoked that.

Julia’s imaging of the aches and pains of doctoral life illustrates one of the key themes that emerged across the interviews and diaries. As another participant, ‘Billie’, put it:

Writing the PhD is really physically uncomfortable, you know it can be so physically unpleasant, so at the end of the day you can feel really awful about your body, you feel all scrunched up and stiff and tired.

FIGURE 13: Julia’s picture of ‘real’ doctoral life
In documenting Julia’s image of the physical ‘drain’ and ‘strain’ of the PhD, I am connecting to Rasmussen’s desire for higher education researchers to consider ‘how the academy, as it is currently configured in specific sites, materializes specific types of bodies – stressed bodies, bodies that stoop under the weight of work, bodies that are harmed by excess sitting and typing’ (Allen & Rasmussen, 2015, p. 692). By examining the strained muscles of doctoral bodies via this image, we are called once again to think about the impacts of the intensified and hyper-competitive doctoral present; as Julia notes, ‘all the tension’ can create significant pain and discomfort.

Julia’s image was created as she came toward the end of her PhD. In our interview she told me that she had been thinking about getting a job. As a critical researcher Julia expressed some discomfort discussing her ‘tactical’ approach to academic employment; however she acknowledged that, with ‘too many PhDs on the job market’, publication strategies and the way she ‘packaged’ herself were important aspects of improving her position. Yet Julia’s narrative was complex. During our interview she said she ‘totally want[s] one of those academic jobs’ and that ‘I’d still rather do this than anything else. I would like to get an academic job’. She also identified that her immediate aim was a ‘great postdoc in a good institution, overseas’. But in the same interview Julia said she was not ‘100% sure’ that she ‘even want[ed] to get a university job, especially the way the neoliberal university is these days and the pressure I see academics under’. She noted that she had ‘huge concerns’ about both the way academics were being ‘ranked’ and ‘judged’ by performative measures such as the PBRF, as well as the ‘ways they are being encouraged to act’. She later explained her lack of clarity as a part of her own process of coming to terms with the ‘fear of not finding any
employment’, which was something Julia observed many of her ‘friends doing PhDs’ were also concerned about:

if I don’t get one [an academic job] I probably won’t continue as an academic, but then I don’t know, do I need to? Maybe I am just telling myself this to reassure myself that it will be okay or maybe I am just pragmatic and see there are other ways to do the things I like... I am trying to put myself in a position where I can deal with what is kind of happening, what it throws up.

Most curious for me as a reader was the way Julia’s recognition of the intensification of academic work rubbed up against other parts of the interview where she asks if doctoral students are: ‘expecting too much? Expecting to really be able to have a comfortable, secure job, doing what they love. Is that too much to ask?’ In fact Julia answers her own question. While she would love ‘you know a world where everybody has secure employment and income that is just maybe not the kind of world we live in.’ She added that, in comparison, maybe academics still do not have it that bad. Coming from a career in the arts, Julia knew that ‘there are a lot of people who are a lot more vulnerable in terms of their livelihood than academics’.

The three sentences I have highlighted above pinpoint the argument I am making in this chapter. Attachments to the doctorate as a ‘good life’ fantasy or aspiration for the future seem to coexist uneasily with up-close experiences which suggest things may, in fact, pan out otherwise. As Julia notes, perhaps the ‘pressure’ of academic work may not deliver the fantasies she thought it might. But somehow the ‘good life’ fantasy of academia, via the doctorate, endures. In Julia’s talk an academic workplace is still seen to promise a job that is ‘comfortable’, ‘secure’ and where people can do ‘what they love’. Julia speaks to
this impasse when she says ‘that is just maybe not the kind of world we live in’, which echoes the common sense ‘just one of those things’ (Anonymous, 2014) we heard earlier. If the ‘Why this attachment’ part of this chapter detailed the ‘affective bindings’ (Gill & Pratt, 2008, p. 15) of doctoral desire, then I suggest that the three images I have selected above give an impression of its contradictions and potential unsustainability. While aspirations for the doctorate coalesced around mobility, security and retreat, in these images we see something else. These are pictures of the worn-out bodies of stressed-out students. Given the heavy burden and dark mood visible in these pictures, we ought to repeat the question that guides this chapter: Why this attachment? How, in this context, do we relate to aspirations to academia?’ How can we understand the durability of the dream of the ‘academic good life’ when the doctoral present, at least for some students, has started to look more like a nightmare? In the next section I try and answer these questions by drawing on Berlant’s Cruel Optimism.

The ‘Cruel Optimism’ of the PhD

As I have outlined in the accounts above, the doctorate appears to operate as an ‘organising fantasy’ for students’ imaginings of a particular kind of ‘good life’. This ‘good life’ hangs, at least in part, upon normative desires for upward mobility, secure employment, and/or the possibility of retreat from more stressful forms of labour. In this final section I want to explore how Berlant’s queer analysis of optimism might be applied to doctoral aspiration. I suggest that we can understand students’ enduring attachments to the PhD, even though evidence of its ‘instability, fragility and dear cost abounds’ (Berlant, 2011a, p. 2) through the analytic lens of ‘cruel optimism’ (2011a). While Berlant does not herself specify what it is that makes this work queer, I view it as such because it
seeks to problematise ‘passionate or irrational attachments to...normative worlds’ (p. 183), and to trace the challenge of ‘detaching from the normal’ (p. 21). According to Berlant, conventional fantasies – like attaining the ‘academic good life’ via the PhD – may be embedded in a relation of cruel optimism, that is, a ‘condition of maintaining an attachment to a significantly problematic object’ (Berlant, 2011a, p. 125).

As Berlant argues, such an affective framework can arise from the double bind where even if an object of desire is ‘discovered either to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or too possible, and toxic’ (2011, p. 24), proximity to the desired object has come to represent an enabling condition, or a sense of ‘something of the continuity of the subject’s sense to keep on living on...’ (2011, p. 24). As I see it, both of these descriptions – ‘impossibility’ and ‘toxicity’ – return us to earlier accounts of the ‘flood’ of students, as well as the ‘desiccated’ (Puar, 2012) zone of academic work and life where the ‘substance’ (e.g. weekends and leisure, time with family, or enough time to follow one’s teaching or research interests) is steadily being squeezed out (Wills, 1996, p. 299). As Berlant distinguishes, all attachment is optimistic:

But what makes it cruel is different than what makes something merely disappointing. When your pen breaks, you don’t think, ‘this is the end of writing.’ But if a relation in which you’ve invested fantasies of your own coherence and potential breaks down, the world itself feels endangered (2012, p. 1).

Let’s bring this back to the scene of the doctorate. I am interpreting the talk and images of doctoral exhaustion that I introduced earlier as evidence of cruel optimism. As Berlant (2011a) observes, ‘our cruel objects don’t feel threatening, just tiring’ (p. 31) when ‘life-building’ becomes uncertain, or even ‘life-
expending’ (p. 42). Yet even students like Julia, who observe the unravelling of the promises of the PhD, seem unwilling to surrender the fantasy of what it is the PhD stands for: a job that is ‘comfortable’, ‘secure’ and where people can do ‘what they love’. An explanation of Julia’s endurance of the process of the PhD is perhaps best illustrated by paraphrasing Berlant directly. It is because the poetics of attachment:

always involves some splitting off of the story I can tell about wanting to be near [the PhD] (as though [the PhD] has autonomous qualities) from the activity of the emotional habitus I have constructed as a function of having [the PhD] in my life, in order to be able to project out my endurance in proximity to the complex of what [the PhD] seems to offer and proffer (p. 25)

In this paragraph Berlant (2011a) distinguishes between the emotion of optimism and an ‘affective structure’ (p. 2) of a relation of cruel optimism. This latter phenomenon involves a propensity to return to the ‘scene of fantasy’ (p. 2) as a result of the ‘emotional habitus’ that has been built up around the object of desire. In this case then, a relation of cruel optimism ‘is not just a psychological state’ (p. 27-28). Indeed, it may not even ‘feel optimistic’ (p. 2), as it can ‘manifest as a range of emotions. [One] might be flooded and feel numb, overwhelmed, teary, angry, detached, capacious, sleepy, or whatever’ (p. 81). What makes this affective structure cruel is that the thing one desires and develops attachments to (such as the idea of a ‘secure’ job in the academy, or the university as a ‘retreat’ from stress) may in fact be ‘an obstacle to your flourishing’ (p. 1). This ‘double-bind’ means that ‘massive loss is inevitable if you stay or if you go’ (Berlant, 2012, p. 1).

The question remains: in what ways do students cope with this crisis in the reproduction of ‘good academic life’ fantasy? I suggest one arena where we can
observe evidence of ‘coping’ is the practice of writing, and publication in particular. Reading across diaries and interview transcripts, I discerned multiple situations where students persisted with intensive publication strategies (see Chapter 3), even while acknowledging that so much writing was wearing them out. I suggest that such deep investments in writing can be interpreted as individualised modes of repairing attachments to the fantasy of the PhD. For these students, it seems that the neoliberal norm of personal responsibility encourages them into positions of ‘self-governance’, into ‘taking responsibility for working harder, faster and better, thus “improving” [their] “output”’ (Ball, 2010, p. 124). The logic goes that if students were just able to publish more, maybe they might secure a better grip on the ‘academic good life,’ and its related fantasies. In this sense, writing can be said to be one of a number of practices that can assist students to ‘affectively manage’ crisis, by keeping them ‘proximate to the horizon’ of the wished-for academic future.

**Notes on what to do next (a concluding section)**

If the diary-interview data I introduced earlier helps us to appreciate doctoral fantasies, and the self-portraits assist us to apprehend the doctoral present, then I suggest Berlant’s conceptual work here offers clues as to what may be stuck about doctoral aspiration now. What remains to be done is to think about an appropriate response. Can we, doctoral students and academics, begin to imagine routes into doctoral aspiration that are less exhausting, less cruel? Berlant underplays the capacity of her work for such a project, ‘I am actually pretty lame at imagining a *repaired* world. What I provide best are depictions of what makes people stuck…’ (2012, p. 4). However, those working with her framework offer us some possibilities. Thinking with Berlant, Chuh (2013)
advises ‘disinterestedness’. This, she argues, ‘disaggregates the (idea of a coherent) self from the presumption of success or failure, of the goodness or badness of an act’ (para. 12). While recognising this is somewhat impossible advice, she counsels her students to live and work ‘as if it’s not about you’, and cautions them to be:

wary of casting yourself in a melodrama that is the affective environment of academia. What appear/feel to be, and sometimes are, life and death matters (Am I smart enough? Will I pass my exams? Will I get a job? Will I be tenured?) are unforgiving personalisations that individualize the conditions far beyond one’s control (para. 12)

I believe such a way of relating to doctoralness might be especially helpful in encouraging students to reframe social discourses of shame and inadequacy away from themselves and onto the failings of their fantasies. Equally, it might encourage doctoral students to begin asking different kinds of questions, for example: ‘how do I want to work?’ seems to open up quite different answers than ‘how do I get an academic job?’ (Russo, 2012). Ultimately, Berlant’s work encourages us to find ‘better objects for better optimism’ in a time where the old fantasies are looking threadbare. But such a process of detaching from ‘toxic norms’ will necessitate a more experimental stance toward life and career-building. Doctoral students would need to ‘have patience with failure, with trying things out, to try new forms of life that also might not work—which doesn’t make them worse than what’s there now’ (Berlant, 2012, p. 4). Becoming more experimental with our fantasies of the good life might be the best bet for getting out of relations of cruel optimism, the best bet for getting ‘out of this prolonged sense of crisis, this sustained and boring code red...’ (Brager, 2012, para. 11).
FIGURE 14: Melanie’s picture of ‘real’ doctoral life
CHAPTER 7

QUEER(Y)ING THE AFFECTIVE-POLITICS OF DOCTORAL EDUCATION

Closing reflections

This final chapter reflects back on the work of the study and brings my research to a conclusion. It begins by drawing together the core arguments that I have advanced across the previous six chapters. Following this, I identify and discuss the key contributions offered by this thesis as a whole. Next, I consider a number of limitations that constrain the findings, and offer recommendations for future research in related fields. I conclude the chapter with my own reflections on this, a doctoral experience of writing and feeling about the contemporary doctorate.

**Doctoral education as an affective-political practice**

This study set out to explore doctoral education within the changing conditions of the contemporary university. The project was sparked by a curiosity about how the wide scale re-framing of the doctorate as a driver of innovation in the knowledge economy, as well as how increased regulation, intensified responsibility and growing surveillance were all impacting upon doctoral researchers’ felt experience of the PhD. It was motivated by an understanding that knowledge about doctoral education is habitually oriented toward developing programmes and pedagogies to assist students to *meet* new expectations that have arisen. To date, the question of the lived experience of doctoral students within the present conditions of doctoral education has
remained under-considered. In recognition of the above concerns, this thesis was designed to address the following research aims:

- To understand the implications of recognising doctoral education as an affective-political practice, and;
- To explore what queer concepts can do when applied to the affective-political scene of doctoral education.

In what follows, I summarise the key findings of each of my analytic chapters, and then discuss the overall findings of the thesis.

In Chapter 2, *Using evocative methodologies to attend to doctoral education’s affective landscape*, I sought to represent some of the affective-political ‘stuff’ that occurs as a part of ordinary doctoral life. The chapter took affect as both an object of inquiry (i.e. the emotions of doctoral students) as well as a methodological orientation that might inform how higher education studies may be researched and written. In particular the chapter explored the possibilities of evocative writing methodologies (Richardson, 1994b) to attend to and represent affect. The chapter wove together two writing ‘experiments’ I conducted during my thesis and read them as autoethnographic data. The argument I have made is that evocative writing methodologies can enable a more nuanced engagement with what it feels like to be a doctoral student in the neoliberal university than conventional research articles tend to do. The act of queering performed by the chapter was its inversion of the generic practices of academic writing. The chapter illustrated that there is nothing natural about taken-for-granted approaches to academic representation; instead these are revealed as a set of performances that congeal to form rigid generic conventions. The implication of
this chapter is that researchers who are interested in the affective landscapes of universities might continue to explore genres of writing that are infrequently associated with higher education research.

In Chapter 3, *Queer(y)ing the affective-politics of higher education*, I offered a follow-up analysis of the case of ‘Catherine’, a doctoral student who tightly controlled her emotions in order to facilitate writing productivity. My first reading of the case was built upon existing studies about doctoral learning, academic identity, and anxiety (Beard, Clegg & Smith, 2007; Bosanquet & Cahir, 2015; Cotterall, 2013; Grant & Elizabeth, 2014; Stubb, Pyhältö & Lonka, 2011), and took quite a pessimistic view of ‘managing’ anxiety in order to ‘keep calm and carry on’ writing. In my first reading I identified the ‘emotion manager’ as an affective subject position likely to render Catherine complicit and governable, and unlikely to disrupt politics-as-usual. Yet in this thesis, I decided to reconsider Catherine’s story a second time. In my second approach to the case, I drew upon queer theoretical work, including Jagose’s (2010) consideration of complex agency, to subvert and extend critical readings of the politics of affect. I suspended my earlier impulse to associate anxiety with political irrelevance, in order to explore how this particular affective configuration may offer possibilities. I argued that when higher education researchers think about it, politics is often conceptualised as collective, conscious and organised. This habit of thought brings some affects into view as political resources, and diminishes others as liabilities that merely get in the way. Following Jagose (2010), I proposed that affective phenomena that are coded ‘negative’ and seemingly politically unhelpful – such as anxiety, and calm self-management – might open twisted routes to agency. Such an understanding points toward the need to more closely consider the question of what counts as ‘political’ in higher education.
thought, and to explore available political modes which may be routinely discounted. While these less recognisable modes of agency may not provide a clear pathway forward for political activism, accounts of agency which can understand it as an ‘activity of maintenance, not making’ (Berlant, 2007, p. 759), may offer examples of how to recognise political engagement within the constraints of doctoral education’s precarious present.

In Chapter 4, *Not writing, and giving zero f**ks about it*, I explored queer readings of failure in order to re-consider the affective scene of guilt about (not) writing in a context where doctoral students are often on normalised timelines which encourage them to ‘write early and write often’ (Lee & Aitchison, 2009, p. 94). Following Halberstam’s (2011) critique of conventional notions of heteronormative and neoliberal ‘success’, I offered a case of a first-year student, ‘Ricki’, who described their motivation for doing a doctorate as pursuing a ‘creative intellectual project’. As a result of this framing, Ricki identified alternative terms for learning and writing than those typically seen in the doctoral education literature, as well as not writing much during their first doctoral year. After closely reading Ricki’s interview transcript, I positioned ‘giving zero-fucks’ as a possible subject position vis-à-vis doctoral writing, and normative notions of doctoral ‘success’. I suggested that such a mode of being may offer creative opportunities to re-think the doctorate outside of the reductive and technicist rationalities (Bansel, 2011) that tend to frame many higher education debates. I also re-considered failure’s feelings. Despite being frequently associated with affective practices of guilt, shame and disappointment, I suggested that failure might also open onto alternative feelings such as relief, joy and satisfaction. Ultimately, the chapter contends that queer concepts might assist higher education researchers to interrogate normative
framings of failure, and to glimpse alternative possibilities for understanding doctoral ‘success’.

In Chapter 5, *Dear obese PhD applicants*, I explored the connections between fat embodiment and the intensified scene of doctoral education. I identified how the signification of fatness (as disorder and a lack of self-management) clashes with the subject positions idealised by the intensified doctorate, which tends to privilege bodies that are readily associated with the self-managing, motivated and disciplined student. The chapter explored a prominent cultural case where a US professor published a tweet in 2013, which implied that ‘obese’ doctoral programme applicants lacked sufficient self-discipline to succeed at doctoral study. I drew upon cultural studies of affect and critical fat studies scholarship in order to understand the resistance enacted on a photo-blog called *Fuck Yeah! Fat PhDs* that arose in response to the tweet. Rather than accepting the way this tweet implicated the fat doctoral subject as bearing a ‘failed’ body that lacked ‘willpower’, I argued that this project worked to associate being ‘fatlicious’ with capability and doctoral success. It also challenged conventions of representing fatness, by illustrating fat bodies as social, desirable and multi-dimensional. The queer work accomplished in this chapter was an interrogation of a ‘thinness norm’ (Eller, 2014) that arises in higher education, which associates hard work and conscientiousness with slender bodies, and laziness and ill-discipline with fat people. The significance of these findings is their call for renewed attention to both the experiences of educational subjects whose bodies are marked by difference, as well the kinds of politics that may emerge from affective scenes of shame.
In Chapter 6, *The trouble with doctoral aspiration now*, I drew on verbal and visual data from across the empirical study to critically examine affective practices that are often assumed to be positive for political transformation: optimism and aspiration. Drawing on Berlant’s (2011a) idea of ‘cruel optimism’, I argued that optimistic attachments to an ‘academic good life’ can bind doctoral subjects to precarious modes of living. In order to explain the endurance of such fantasies, I unpacked the difficult choices many students have to make between retaining an attachment to the doctorate despite not having access to the future that it was expected to promise, or detaching, and experiencing the loss of the fantasy associated with the PhD. I suggested that the practice of writing, and publication in particular, may be interpreted as a mode of ‘adjustment’ that keeps students tethered to the organising fantasy of the academic good life. I ended the chapter with a call to imagine new, and hopefully less cruel, kinds of doctoral aspiration.

Overall, my analyses from Chapters 2-6 signal a commitment to a different style of doctoral education scholarship – one that sees the doctoral experience as a messy, complex and politically and emotionally engaged practice. The significance of this understanding is that we need to supplement existing research that seeks to ‘improve’ doctoral practice or ‘resolve’ the emotions of students who undertake it, with studies concerned with what doctoral emotions can teach us about the possibilities and constraints for action in the present. By grounding the analysis of doctoral education within the contemporary conditions of doctoral education, this thesis has addressed some of the shortcomings in political analyses of doctoral education to date. It has illustrated that doctoral education is not an atemporal practice. Instead, it is revealed as a social practice under increasing pressure as a result of the creep of neoliberal rationalities, managerialism and cultures of audit in the ‘enterprise university’
(Bansel, 2011; Ditton, 2009; Sullivan & Simon, 2014). The chapters have foregrounded the complex affective dynamics that surround the choices doctoral students make in the present. These include decisions about how much time to devote to working, how often to publish, and how to motivate oneself to keep writing (Chapter 3). They also include big questions, like ‘What are the chances of me living the academic good life, anyway’? (Chapter 5).

In some ways trying to summarise such a motley crew of chapters is a challenging task. While all of the chapters circle around concepts like ‘queer’, ‘doctoral education’ and ‘affect’, clearly they do not accumulate in the form of a tidy pathway forward for the transformation of doctoral education. Rather than a linear argument, where one chapter might expand on the next, throughout this thesis I have imagined the chapters as small queer experiments in (re)thinking higher education research. Halberstam’s (2011) work has been a critical touchstone in following through with this aspiration. In a passage in *The Queer art of failure* (2011) Halberstam cites Hall (1991) who reminds us that theory is not an end unto itself but ‘a detour en route to something else’ (p. 43). In this context then, Halberstam suggests, researchers:

> might consider the utility of getting lost over finding our way, and so we should conjure a Benjaminian stroll or situationist dérive, an ambulatory journey through the unplanned, the unexpected, the improvised and the surprising’ (Halberstam, 2011, p. 15).

These words are, I hope, descriptions that can be applied to the arguments, and style of argumentation, I have put forward. In the section that follows, I read across the thesis in order to identify the contributions my study makes to the research on doctoral emotions and queer research in higher education.
Contributions of the study

The research makes three significant contributions to higher education research, and doctoral education studies in particular. The first is that the thesis *extends accounts of the affective-political analysis of academic labour to explore the emotions of doctoral education*. This, in turn, facilitates the second contribution, which is to *reconceptualise doctoral education as an affective-political practice*. The third contribution made by this study is its demonstration of the *productivity of queer concepts for understanding affective-political phenomena in doctoral education*, and the broader possibility of queer(y)ing higher education research beyond (and including) sex, sexuality and gender.

Contributions to studies of doctoral emotion

Near the beginning of this PhD I pinned a strip from the webcomic ‘Piled Higher and Deeper’ to the wall in front of my computer. The picture has two panels. In the first a young woman doctoral student sits at a desk, and the text above her reads: ‘How you see yourself’. Surrounding her are words that attest to the embodied and affective world of the doctorate, including ‘complex human being’, ‘hopes’, ‘dreams’, and ‘aspirations’. The second panel, in contrast, reads ‘How most professors see you’ and the once flesh and blood student has been replaced with a brain on a stick. While this comic, and its binary representation of student and professorial readings of doctoral affect, certainly oversimplifies matters, I think it points to something in cultural circulation about how the affective dimensions of doctoral study tend to be minimised. While many students experience doctoral education as a profoundly challenging, and oftentimes emotionally intense experience, all too often doctoral ‘guide’ and
'companion' texts represent writing, for example, as if students just need to follow a step-by-step recipe.

A key contribution this thesis makes to the field is the way it has taken the affective experiences, including the suffering of students, seriously. Typically, as Barcan (2013) notes, academics who complain about their labour conditions and wellbeing are ‘met by strategies that individualize and pathologize’ (p. 8), that is, strategies that interpret bad feelings as possessed by individual who has the ‘problem’. I suggest that similar habits of thinking about emotions, such as those I traced in the ethnographic fiction in Chapter 2, occur for doctoral students also. However, this thesis has offered an alternative reading of affect, one that places it firmly within the political sphere. In this thesis I have argued that while the doctorate has often been a difficult and taxing experience for students, the current contingencies of doctoral life also contribute to some of negative feelings that students are reporting. The implication of this understanding is that affect can be a diagnostic tool for social researchers. We can use affective phenomena in order to build more complex pictures of the impact of doctoral education reform on the lives of students. This way of understanding doctoral emotions builds on a wide body of work that has explored the affective consequences of neoliberal reform to academic labour. My work echoes Barcan’s (2013, p. 8) call that researchers need to ‘meet large-scale structural and ideological change with something more subtle than a macho, individualizing logic that implies that people are not up to the challenge’. I have approached doctoral feeling with Barcan’s call for nuance in mind, and have re-positioned the affective dimensions

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of doctoral study as imbricated within broader social, cultural and economic contexts. This means that any approach to emotional suffering ought not be reduced to individual psychopathology but it should be considered within its broader socio-historical milieu. In addition to its helpful diagnostic uses for social research, in this thesis I have also demonstrated that negative states of feeling may be related to the political in another sense. As I outline below, this thesis has asked queer questions about what undesirable things ‘good’ feelings might hold in place, and has tried to keep an open mind about what ‘bad’ feelings might enable.

**Contributions to studies of doctoral writing**

My study also makes contributions to the field of doctoral writing. Its conceptual framework – an affective-political approach – provides useful analytic tools to examine doctoral writing in more complex ways. As I have argued in this thesis, a majority of doctoral writing knowledge is underpinned by a general assumption that writing is a somewhat mechanical skill that can be learned straightforwardly by students. While it has become increasingly common to re-position doctoral writing as a social and embodied practice (see discussion in Interlude 2), literature about its emotional context remains limited. A particular gap that this study responds to is the lack of accounts regarding the affective consequences of changes to the conditions of doctoral writing in recent years. Since I began this study in 2011, I have located only a few other studies that are contextualised by political readings of the doctoral present, and take as their focus the affective practices associated with doctoral writing. In Interlude 2 I introduced work by Aitchison and Mowbray (2015) which focuses on the impacts of diversification and intensification on doctoral writing practice, particularly the
growth of non-institutional support services. My study is similar to Aitchison and Mowbray’s (2015), in the sense that it also looks at the affective consequences of increasing pressure on doctoral students. However, my work differs in its broad focus on the practice of writing, and its emphasis on generating information about the perspectives of doctoral students themselves. Although the last few decades have seen an increase in the amount of research into doctoral writing, within the academic literature few studies have considered students’ perspectives in depth.

Rather than ‘finding a solution’ to what is described as the ‘problem’ of doctoral writing, the chapters in this thesis have taken it as a ‘lifeworld’. Taking up this position has allowed me to depart from some of the most basic assumptions made by those who are working to improve doctoral writing pedagogy and practice. For example, it has enabled me to ask whether doctoral education researchers can take as given that writing is a good or unproblematic practice, that students should do more of, more quickly, and with higher measurable quality. It has also meant asking what the burdens of writing in the current context may be, both for the learning and development of students, and for their own wellbeing. These are questions that would be considered beside the point in mainstream research accounts of doctoral writing, but I believe they are vital if researchers are to offer a fuller conceptualisation of the practice of doctoral writing today.

Queer theory and higher education research

Another unique feature of my study is its theoretical and methodological orientation. As I have discussed in previous chapters, one of the key warrants of
this thesis has been to explore what queer concepts can do (Rasmussen & Allen, 2014) in the context of research on doctoral education, politics and feeling. I have demonstrated that queer concepts can be mobilised to critique the normal, and thus stimulate new kinds of thinking about the affective-politics of doctoral writing. A key contribution made by this thesis is its intervention within higher education debates that have taken binary approaches to the political value of affect. I have interrogated the conventional terms of these debates, in order to explore what negative states – such as shame, tight emotional management, or failure – might offer for social practice and political transformation (Blackman, 2015). My project has also sought to trace the barriers to agency that may be animated by so-called positive affects, such as aspiration. Taken together, this work identifies the need to re-think the binary of positive and negative feelings, and fixed notions of what their political energies may be. This is not to say the binary should be reversed – but instead that we need to understand that affective events are subtle and complex, and may produce unexpected outcomes. The implication of this work is in line with the methodological spirit of Britzman’s (1995b) ‘study of limits’ that I introduced in Interlude 1. It means that higher education researchers are encouraged to explore the limits of our political imaginations and to understand the political value of negative feelings as a ‘problem of thinkability’. Such an approach may open new pathways, including ‘forms of activism that can address messy feelings rather than trying to banish them’ (Cvetkovich, 2012b, p. 110).

As I outlined in Chapter 4, education research has a tendency to anchor queer theory to issues of sex, sexuality and gender. This makes sense given the historical emergence of queer theory, which came about in part, as a response to perceived limitations in the thought of LGBT studies. Recent work in education
(Gowlett & Rasmussen, 2014, Rasmussen & Allen, 2014) and higher education in particular (Allen, 2015) has called for researchers to search for ways out of ‘the queer cul-de-sac’ (p. 433), and called for queer thinking to be taken into spaces where it might not seem to belong. The potential of queer theory to move in such a direction in education research has been sketched by Raewyn Connell in a recent interview with Rasmussen and Gowlett (2014):

If we define a queer approach broadly, it can be applied to problems in education that aren’t, on the face of it, close to sexuality. League tables for instance. Why this relentless drive to expand competitive testing, to audit till we are blue in the face, and at the end of the day, to teach to the test? Why this push for practices that teachers know to be anti-educational in a very deep way? This is neoliberal policy, and the privileged social interests involved are obvious. But something here exceeds a question of interests. There’s a powerful desire at work in this managerial enthusiasm for top-down curricula, for testing-and-ranking-and-selecting-and-excluding. That’s the kind of thing queer research might illuminate (p. 344).

My research – which looks at the queer energies of feelings, good and bad – should be seen as expanding these recent movements. My work is takes queer critique to an anti-normative project that does not explicitly take sex, sexuality or gender as its object.

As I explained in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the work I have done with queer theory has been variegated, working between radical traditions of social justice, and the ‘troubling’ orientation of queer theoretical work. Take for example, Chapters 4 and 5, which focus on doctoral writing failure, and fat embodiment respectively. While there are some commonalities visible across the two chapters – for example, a focus on ‘failure’, doctoral productivity and the identification and subversion of norms – there are also some clear conceptual
gaps. One chapter rejects failure by illustrating the viability and success of fat bodies, whereas the other embraces the potential of failure as an analytic stance that undermines the foundations upon which doctoral writing success itself is built. While there may be a temptation to reconcile the different kinds of queer analysis that are offered, I have elected not to do this. What I have aimed to do instead is to foreground the uneasiness between them, in order to illustrate the abruptly different kinds of work that queer concepts can be made to do. This tension began as an accident and a dilemma, but I now take it as an opportunity to explore the possibilities and limits of these different positionings.

**Limitations and future research**

Following some reflection on my research practice, I have identified a number of limitations that constrain the findings that I have presented. While the writing guides I have consulted suggest that the limitations section of the thesis is the place to intercept the criticisms of ones’ readers, I hope to take a less paranoid and more reflective approach to writing this section. My goal here is to both problematise aspects of my study, as well as to offer alternatives for future researchers, who could make use of, or extend, my contributions.

My goal throughout has been to think about how the felt experience of doctoral education is constituted in the cultural and empirical texts subject to analysis. The evidence presented in the chapters above is necessarily partial. I have selected the images or passages of text that I found to be most interesting and relevant for my concerns. While the evidence I have presented does make contributions to bodies of knowledge about doctoral education, and the affective-politics of higher education, this material does not include all of the possible
narratives that I could have shared. Although I have read, and engaged with all of the material, only a tiny portion of some interviews, diary entries or methods at the retreat has appeared in the final analysis chapters of this study. In speaking with my participants, reading through their transcripts or viewing their artwork I have noticed many other concerns that may be deeply significant to them, whether this be about supervision relationships, family life, the spaces they work in, or their own unique and creative practices for getting their words onto a page. I feel a sense of sadness that I do not have time or space to work with these stories. I hope that in the future I am able to continue with some of this material.

Secondly, the ways I spoke about doctoral education and feeling both in the interview (see Appendix C) and at the retreat arguably invited the students to position themselves as subjects in ways they may not have considered prior to participating in my study. This was clear at the writing retreat sessions, where in some activities I asked students to tell me about their experiences of becoming ‘writers’. Several students remarked that such an identity (the writer) was a new way of thinking for them. Many students accepted that they wrote, but did not necessarily see themselves as doctoral writers. Equally, although my advertisement did not exclude doctoral students who did not consider writing to be a particularly emotionally engaged activity, such doctoral students may have excluded themselves from my study.

Other methodological choices that I made will have influenced the ways that students represented their felt experience of the doctorate. This is true for all methodologies, which facilitate certain kinds of researched and researcher selves to come forward, and not others. In this study I noticed that the diary entries
were often rather confessional in tone, and had a more intensive affective energy – which is characteristic of the genre. Often students would write in the ‘heat of the moment’, with a tendency to describe strong feelings, whereas in one-on-one interviews with the same writers, students often relayed experiences that were cooler, and less emotionally intense. However, several interviews were very charged – as if the focus on felt experience, and an available (even enthusiastic) listener, encouraged participants to share stories of grief, worry and sadness. Several times students became tearful as they relayed experiences of worry about the future, or the perceived carelessness of a supervisor. At certain moments I felt like the interviews, with their focus on emotional life, took on an almost therapeutic feeling that I associate with counselling or psychotherapy. It was not my intention to enter therapeutic territory in the interviews, and I cannot be certain that this feeling was shared by the students I was interviewing. However, one student did speak into the audio recorder at the end of our interview to thank me, and state that he had enjoyed the experience of being listened to. I mark these features here, not because I think that they are necessarily problematic, but because they inflect the empirical material with different kinds of affective energy than might have been generated from alternative methods.

Additionally, some of the students found aspects of participating in this study uncomfortable. While I believe it is valuable to share the challenges that doctoral students are experiencing in the contemporary university, it is difficult to do this without asking real people to share things that are often kept private. While I tried to design the retreat to be a collaborative and caring space, several students remarked that they were comparing themselves to other doctoral students, wondering if they were working hard enough, or long enough, or publishing enough. One student said she found the deep reflection on doctoral identity to be
unsettling. It is understandable that questions like ‘who am I, why am I writing, how do I feel, and what does the future hold?’ can be unwelcome and intrusive. This student reported that she sought out hours of supervision afterwards because it had been difficult to be confronted with such big questions at a particular stage of her candidature where she did not have ready answers. While it is unpredictable what kinds of questions might provoke discomfort for participants, I would recommend that future researchers interested in the affective lives of doctoral students reiterate to participants that they are welcome to opt out of any questions or activities that they do not wish to take part in.

In terms of participant recruitment, it was difficult to recruit as many doctoral students from culturally diverse backgrounds as would be desirable in research set in Aotearoa New Zealand. While I make no claims to the generalisability of this research, I was disappointed that my sample so heavily comprised students who identified as being of Pākehā descent. Of the ten participants recruited for this study, none self-identified as Māori with only one participant identifying as from a Paskifika ethnicity and another of Asian descent. The low diversity of this research sample does not reflect the cultural diversity of the NZ population, nor of doctoral study, especially given the increasing participation of Māori and the high number international students coming from Asia (see Chapter One). For future research, it would be useful for researchers to make greater efforts to recruit participants from more culturally diverse backgrounds. In so doing researchers may be better able to explore the impacts of ethnicity on the felt experience of doctoral education in the present. In a more general sense, I accept that this thesis has offered limited portrayals of particular groups of students who are associated with disadvantage in doctoral education in Aotearoa NZ. While at points the thesis touches on social variables such as body size and
gender, other experiences of social difference, such as class, race, and ability have not been a significant focus of this study. Despite existing accounts of the experiences of doctoral women (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013), future research might take a particular focus on groups of students whose experiences of the felt experience of doctoral education remains under-considered, for example Māori and Paskifika students, working class, and disabled students.

For future researchers interested in designing a study similar to mine, I would also suggest employing multiple interviews. In my original plan for this research, the field study would have lasted one year, and I would have taken interviews at the beginning and end of the period, with the retreat halfway through, in order to trace how doctoral students thought and talked about doctoral education over time. I thought this would be a helpful approach, especially as many participants moved from discrete stages of candidature (e.g. provisional to full candidature, or finishing thesis to graduation). However, due to time constraints, I was unable to follow through with this original goal. While the retreat did go some way to developing stronger relationships with participants, had I undertaken a longer process of interviewing, these relationships could have been developed further. This could have enhanced the data generated and my knowledge of the students’ doctoral experiences.

For future research that sought to build on the writing retreat method, I would advise a less ‘research intensive’ timetable, with fewer data collection activities, and more time for the students to enjoy their time at the retreat. For many students in this study, a residential retreat out of the city was a rare opportunity to get away to write, read and have their basic needs cared for. I regret that I designed the retreat to take up so much of the time in collecting data.
Thinking of future research, I believe that a longitudinal study on the felt experiences of doctoral education would be particularly informative. This approach would allow researchers to investigate both the ways that students reported felt experience differed at various points throughout their doctoral experience. It could stretch even further to explore the experience of transitioning from doctoral study into becoming an early career academic, or moving away from academia altogether. It would allow researchers to trace the shifting socio-economic and political environment over time and how this animates different affective-political practices within doctoral education. Future research could also interview other stakeholders. Although the purpose of this research was to present students’ understandings of the felt experience of doctoral education, it would also be valuable to collect the understandings of supervisors and other figures involved in the lives of doctoral students, in order to build a more comprehensive picture.

In addition to a longitudinal study, I think the field would also benefit from greater historical inquiry. One of the issues I have had in my work about the ‘present’ of doctoral education is a shortage of accounts about the ‘history’ of feeling the doctorate over time. It is clear there are some interesting narratives of continuity regarding the stresses of doctoral education, however, that might trouble some of my arguments about the affective impacts of recent reforms. For example, one author as far back as 1903 described the PhD as an ‘octopus’ (Russel, 2002, p. 243) which had its students tangled in unclear writing requirements. Alison Lee and Carolyn Williams’ (1999) paper Forged in Fire: Narratives of trauma in PhD supervision pedagogy is perhaps the most helpful resource I have found which offers an account of the emotions of doctoral students over time. Lee and Williams (1999) take a particular focus on trauma
and distress in the production of the thesis, and emphasise persistent stories of trauma, loss and abandonment. More accounts of this kind are required to give a more nuanced picture of how doctoral feeling may have changed over periods of immense transformation in the meanings and practices of doctoral education.

Finally, I am aware that critics might charge me with an act of oversimplification in my focus on tracing the gloomy mood of the contemporary university, and not its excitements or fulfilment. Many chapters do configure doctoral education in a somewhat grim light. However, in the research poetry presented in Chapter 2, I have also offered a glimpse of doctoral education’s pleasures and potential. While I think it is important to facilitate accounts of doctoral education’s aches, pains and affective pitfalls, we also need to remember its potentialities. Doctoral education can also be a process of immense joy and curiosity for doctoral students, myself included. Future research might seek to trace these possibilities in a more comprehensive way than I have been able to do in this thesis.

**Closing remarks**

I have understood this thesis as a project that sought to open space for a series of queer interventions into the affective-political dimensions of contemporary doctoral education. It has been propelled by a curiosity: how would taking doctoral education as an affective-political practice change how we understand it? And, how might queer concepts help us to see things that have been taken for granted, and feel more uncomfortable about them? These two questions have allowed me to expand the ways researchers can talk about doctoral education. I have pursued these questions because I believe we need counter narratives, other ways of seeing doctoral education, which our colleagues can draw on for their
own thinking and practice. We need new metaphors, alternative images and stories to counteract the dominant neoliberal discourse that renders certain ways of thinking and doing doctoralness possible, and not others. While I assume we are all familiar with doctoral ‘journeys’, I have brought into play a collection of new metaphors to think about doctoral education: floods, fruitful failures, no-fucks, and fake orgasms.

This thesis has not been an attempt to claim the ‘truth’ about doctoral education. None of the analyses I have offered through these chapters, nor the sum of them combined, can fully know how students are feeling their way through their doctorates. Neither does this thesis provide any specific answer to questions about what to do about doctoral feeling or politics now. Instead, each of the chapters above has simply explored particular relationships among doctoral education, feeling and politics in ways that are infrequently imagined within doctoral education literature. This might seem like a rather underwhelming approach to research, given the picture of ‘affective crisis’ I have built up across this thesis. I would like to argue the opposite, however. I suggest that the kind of queer research practice I have undertaken in this thesis is not apolitical, nor too abstract to matter. The chapters poke holes in existing thinking about doctoral education and feeling. By poking these holes I hope to have created small tears in the normative political imagination, spaces where alternative possibilities of thinking and doing might come into focus.

However, without a doubt, this process of poking holes has been enormously challenging for me. At times I have wondered if I continued to puncture the floor beneath me whether I would have anywhere left to stand. Indeed, I have this uneasy feeling right now, as I conclude this thesis. While I have laboured to
surface accounts of doctoral education and affect that were often dark, and arguably growing darker, I now feel a current pulling me to use this space to tidy up the complexity and gaps in meaning that remain in this project. Another way of describing this is that I am drawn to comply with the convention of a ‘happy ending’. But to do so would not be in keeping with the foundations of this study, which has sought to expand the archive of political affects, including unhappy ones. So rather than closing this thesis with the bravado of knowing what should be done to address the affective suffering of doctoral students, or the impasse of neoliberalism in the academy, I close instead with a hope that those who are interested in doctoral education and affective life in the university have found something in this thesis that speaks to them – whether this be material that sparks future inquiry, bones to pick, or ways of thinking that readers can bring to their own lives as inhabitants of the university.

Aware I am now coming to the end, I take another moment to feel the hum of the engine of my computer reverberating through my fingers. I stretch my neck, and take another sip of tea. I delay setting down the final line of this thesis; this writing and feeling about doctoral education that has been rough and uneasy, but also deeply satisfying. I want to leave the last words to Foucault via Ricki’s tattoo: ‘we are much freer than we think’.
FIGURE 15: Luke’s picture after writing
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Advertisements for participant recruitment
Invitation to participate in a study of PhD and EdD students writing experiences

The broad aim of this project is to explore the writing experiences of doctoral students.

The title of my study is:

Be{com}ing a doctoral writer: An analysis of affect

The objectives of this project are:

• To contribute to the theorising of doctoral writing, and emotions in the field of higher education.
• To analyse how doctoral writers’ emotions are represented in doctoral writing self-help books and scholarly literature.
• To examine how emotions experienced while writing, and about being a writer, are understood and interpreted by doctoral students in the humanities/social sciences.

Participation in this project will involve contact with the researcher for a period of 4 months. This will involve attending one over night writing retreat (3 days/2 nights = 16.75 research hours), completing a short entry in a writing journal weekly for a one-month period (total 2 hours), and undertaking 1 x 1 hour semi-structured interviews (total 1 hour).

The costs for participating in the retreat will be met by funding from the researcher. Participants are responsible for getting themselves to the venue, providing their own breakfasts and a shared pot-luck dinner on the first night of the retreat.

If you are interested in participating in this research or you have any questions please contact:

James Burford
Phone: +64 9 968 8000 ext 48779
Email: jbur168@aucklanduni.ac.nz

OR

Assoc. Prof Barbara Grant
Phone: +64 09 623 8899 ext 48272
Email: bm.grant@auckland.ac.nz

Assoc. Prof Louisa Allen
Phone: +64 09 623 8899 ext 85140
Email: le.allen@auckland.ac.nz

Thank you in advance, for your participation!
[This email is sent on behalf of Faculty of Education doctoral candidate, James Burford. Please direct all correspondence to james.burford1@gmail.com]

Dear doctoral candidates,

Are you a confident academic writer? Do you love writing for your doctorate? Or don’t have any strong feelings toward writing at all?

If your answer is 'yes' to any of these questions, I would be interested in hearing from you. A small number of places are still available to participate in a doctoral project which involves participants attending a three-day doctoral writing retreat, participating in an interview and journaling about writing for their doctorate. Please see the attached advertisement, and contact me directly at james.burford1@gmail.com for more information.

James Burford.

Keitha Shalley
Secretary
Postgraduate Studies
Faculty of Education
The University of Auckland
k.shalley@auckland.ac.nz
ph: ext 48870 or DDI: 09 623 8870
APPENDIX B

Information sheet and consent form for participants
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET
Interview/writing reflection journal/writing retreat

Title: Be(com)ing a doctoral writer: An analysis of affect

My name is James Burford and I am currently undertaking a PhD degree at the Faculty of Education, University of Auckland. I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project I am undertaking.

The specific aims of this project are:

• To analyse how doctoral writers’ emotions are represented in doctoral writing self-help books and scholarly literature.

• To examine how emotions experienced while/about writing are understood and interpreted by doctoral students in the humanities/social sciences.

• To contribute to the theorising of doctoral writing, and emotions in the field of higher education.

I am inviting you to be involved in the research because you are a current doctoral student at the University of Auckland, and you intend to continue studying for the next 12 months. A pseudonym of your choice will be used in the study. However, your stories, thoughts and feelings about writing as a doctoral student will be shared in the public domain (a thesis, and any academic papers, conference presentations or teaching that emerge from this work). Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality, but because of the design of this research, anonymity cannot be assured.

I appreciate that your time is valuable, and acknowledge that this research will involve a significant commitment of your time and energy. I have designed the research in such a way that the data generation methods, (journaling, individual interviews, and writing retreat) will hopefully be mutually illuminating, and will support your own writing projects, and your ongoing development as a doctoral writer. The total amount of time to participate in all components of the research is 19.75 hours.
The project involves participating in three data collection methods: a writing retreat; writing a reflection journal; and an individual interview.

Writing retreat
One three-day (two night) writing retreat will be funded by the researcher. ‘Research’ parts of the writing retreat (where participants come together for research activities) will be digitally recorded (audio, or video) with your prior written consent. This can be turned off should you wish. Private parts of the retreat (where you are eating meals, for instance) will not be included as data. Writing and other forms of representation generated at the retreats (including making art) will be collected, documented and returned to you, or destroyed should you wish. Participants have the option of selecting whether they would like to be observed and videoed while writing privately (for no more than 30 minutes) as a part of the retreat. All participants are asked to keep the identities of participants and matters discussed in the writing retreats confidential, but due to the nature of the group situation confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. In addition, writing retreat participants will not be provided the opportunity to edit the transcripts from the writing retreat, as this material will include excerpts from other participants. If you wish to have all of your content removed from the retreat transcript, or do not wish for your writing or art to be included in the research, you may do so by advising the researcher.

Writing a reflection journal
For the writing reflection journal you will be asked to share your thoughts and feelings on your current writing work as a part of your PhD. This ‘journal’ should be completed at least weekly in the month leading up to individual interview, but more regular use is encouraged. Participants are welcome to write, draw, paint, take photographs or record themselves in dance or other forms of movement as a part of this journal. The emphasis is on what you have been writing, and how you feel about it. Copies of the text or images, or descriptions of other methods of representation may be published alongside interview and writing retreat data. Texts where the identity or image of the participant is visible will not be published.

Individual interview
You will be asked to participate in a one-hour individual interview which will take place in a place of your choosing in 2013. Permission for the digital recording (audio only) of the individual interview will be sought; however, the recorder can be turned off at anytime should you so wish, without having to give a reason. Should you consent to having the interview transcribed, the digital recordings will be transcribed either by the researcher, or a professional transcriber – who will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. A transcript of the interview will be sent to you as soon after the interview as possible so that you can verify that it is an accurate record, or for you to make changes, should you so wish.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time, or withdraw information you have provided in the interview up until the point of data analysis (30 December 2013). Please be aware that assurances have been sought from Associate Professor Graeme Aitken, Dean of the Faculty of Education, and Associate Professor Jan Crosthwaite, Dean of the Faculty of the Arts, that neither your grades, nor your academic relationships, will be affected by either your refusal or agreement to participate in my study.
Participant writing reflection journals, consent forms, and transcribed interview and writing retreat data will be stored separately and securely for six years in my locked office, after which they will be destroyed.

Information that is generated will be analysed and reported on in my PhD thesis and in other future publications and presentations. The final copy will be submitted for assessment for the PhD degree from the University of Auckland and a copy of the thesis will be accessible at the University of Auckland library. Findings will also be used for publication and conference presentations. If you wish to receive a summary of the findings of this study please write your email address in the space provided on the consent form.

Thank you in anticipation for your time and help in making this study possible. If you would like further information about this research project please email me at jbur168@aucklanduni.ac.nz. Alternatively, you can contact either of my supervisors Associate Professor Barbara Grant on (09) 373 7599 extn 48272, or Associate Professor Louisa Allen on (09) 9 623 8899 extn 85140.

For any further enquiries about this research please contact:

The Dean of the Faculty of Education,
Associate Professor Graeme Aitken
Epsom Campus
Faculty of Education
University of Auckland
Private Bag 92601
Symonds Street
Auckland

For any inquiries regarding ethical concerns please contact:

The Chair
The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee
The University of Auckland
Office of the Vice Chancellor
Private Bag 92019
Auckland 1142

Telephone: (09) 3737599 extn 87830
Email: humanethics@auckland.ac.nz

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on 27/12/2012 for a period of (3) years from 27/12/2012. Reference 8675.
CONSENT FORM
For: All participants
THIS FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF 6 YEARS

Tentative Title: Be(com)ing a doctoral writer: An analysis of affect

Student researcher:

James Burford
Doctoral Student

Supervisors:

Associate Professor Barbara Grant and Associate Professor Louisa Allen (Faculty of Education, Auckland University)

I have read the Participant Information Sheet. I have understood the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to take part in this research.

I understand that I am free to withdraw participation at any time, and to withdraw any data traceable to me up to 30 December 2013.

I agree to not disclose anything discussed in the doctoral writing retreat to any person aside from the researcher, and the researcher’s academic supervisors.

I understand that every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality but that due to the design of this research confidentiality can not be assured.

I understand that data will be kept for 6 years, after which they will be destroyed.

I understand that the data will be used for the researcher’s doctoral thesis, conference presentations, publications and for teaching purposes.

I understand that the Deans of the Faculties of Arts and Education have assured that neither my grades, nor my academic relationships will be affected by my refusal or agreement to participate in this research.

I agree / do not agree to be audiotaped.

I agree / do not agree to be videotaped at the writing retreat.
I wish / do not wish to have any of my writing/images collected in this project returned to me.

If you would like a summary of results please include your email address here

______________________________________________________________________________

Name______________________________
Signature ___________________________ Date _________________

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 27/11/2012 FOR (3) YEARS REFERENCE NUMBER 8675.
APPENDIX C

Questions for interview
Indicative semi-structured interview questions

1. How are you going with your writing? What progress have you made? What have been the constraints on your writing?
2. Can you tell me more about your writing practice? When do you write, where do you write, how do you write, who do you write with/for?
3. I noticed (specific experience) in your writing reflection journal. Can you tell me a bit more about it? How did you feel about it?
4. How common would you say this/these feeling(s) (list) are? How intense are they?
5. Did you talk about your feelings about your writing with other people? Who? Can you recall an example for me?
6. What words and images do you associate with your writing at the moment?
7. What do you think different people around the university think about emotions and writing? Your supervisor? Your office mate? The vice chancellor?
APPENDIX D

Writing diary instructions
Your doctoral writing diary

The doctoral writing diary is the first part of my study, and will be followed by the writing retreat, and then an individual interview.

For this task, I ask each of you to complete a writing diary, over a period of at least one month before we have the one-on-one interviews. This could either be a virtual writing journal (using a private blog, or saved in a word document) or a pen & paper diary, or any mixture of these - do whatever works for you (if you’d like to use a paper journal please let me know and I will courier you one). A suggested minimum number of entries over the month, is four entries, but more entries are encouraged. You could think of one diary entry as about one page of writing.

The frame of reference I am using for doctoral writing for my study is: any writing practice associated with your doctoral study. That could include: writing a chapter, an article, conference paper or book review, as well as note taking, writing an email to your supervisor(s), authoring or commenting on an academic blog, writing a funding application, reviewing a manuscript for a journal… any aspect of your doctoral work and life that involves writing/representation.

The purpose of this journal is to better understand how you write in your day-to-day life as a Ph.D student (i.e. your writing practices); what it feels like (physically, emotionally, spiritually, and so on), and your reflections on this. So, please keep in mind description as well as reflection. Often it can be tempting to record only the experiences that feel important and extraordinary – and please do feel encouraged to record intense events. However, don’t forget to also record what is ordinary and run-of-the-mill about your writing practice too. Don’t worry too much about ‘making sense’ or being tidy, you can use words, images, pictures quotes etc.

Please also feel free to include excerpts of your writing, or excerpts from papers you have been reading if this helps you to record your experience, or illustrate a reflection.

If you struggle to get started, or stall throughout the month, do let me know and I can send you some questions that might assist you to complete the entries. I will send a few emails reminders, in case you forget!

Thanks again for your help!
APPENDIX E

Human Ethics approval letter
UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

27-Nov-2012

MEMORANDUM TO:
Assoc Prof Louise Allen
Critical Studies in Education

Re: Application for Ethics Approval (Our Ref. 8675)

The Committee considered your application for ethics approval for your project entitled Be(com)ing a doctoral writer: An analysis of affect.

Ethics approval was given for a period of three years with the following comment(s):

1. Consent Form: Please change the bullet point where assurance is acknowledged to the first person so that it is in the voice of the participant.

The expiry date for this approval is 27-Nov-2015.

If the project changes significantly you are required to resubmit a new application to UAHPEC for further consideration.

In order that an up-to-date record can be maintained, you are requested to notify UAHPEC once your project is completed.

The Chair and the members of UAHPEC would be happy to discuss general matters relating to ethics approvals if you wish to do so. Contact should be made through the UAHPEC ethics administrators at humanethics@auckland.ac.nz in the first instance.

All communication with the UAHPEC regarding this application should include this reference number: 8675.

(This is a computer generated letter. No signature required.)

Secretary
University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee

c.c. Head of Department / School, Critical Studies in Education
Assoc Prof Barbara Grant
Mr James Burford

Additional information:
1. Should you need to make any changes to the project, write to the Committee giving full details including revised documentation.

1 of 2
2. Should you require an extension, write to the Committee before the expiry date giving full details along with revised documentation. An extension can be granted for up to three years, after which time you must make a new application.

3. At the end of three years, or if the project is completed before the expiry, you are requested to advise the Committee of its completion.

4. Do not forget to fill in the 'approval wording' on the Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms, giving the dates of approval and the reference number, before you send them out to your participants.

5. Send a copy of this approval letter to the Manager - Funding Processes, Research Office if you have obtained funding other than from UniServices. For UniServices contract, send a copy of the approval letter to: Contract Manager, UniServices.

6. Please note that the Committee may from time to time conduct audits of approved projects to ensure that the research has been carried out according to the approval that was given.
APPENDIX F

Copy of “Doctoral writing as an affective practice: Keep calm and carry on?”
Doctoral writing as an affective practice: Keep calm and carry on?

Introduction

Does doctoral study feel like it used to? Judging by the tumblrs, blogs and Facebook posts I read, as well as snatches of conversation across the tearoom, it would seem that doctoral students are increasingly sore, stressed, and feeling disappointed, anxious and guilty. Indeed, Roger Burrows has recently argued that the academy is threatened by a “deep, affective, somatic crisis” (2012: 364). If this is indeed the case, it would seem pertinent for researchers to focus attention on the messy, ordinary and emotional lives of doctoral students, and the conditions under which they/we now study, labour and seek employment. As part of this broad project, I believe that it will be important to understand the changing role that writing and be(com)ing a writer are playing in the contemporary constitution of doctoral students. It is my contention that the permeations of managerialism, audit culture and the increasing “metricization” (Burrows 2012) of writing is having significant impacts on the lives of not only academics, but doctoral students as well. In this time where graduates are ‘without a future’ (Mason 2012) and doing a PhD is a ‘waste of time’ given ‘armies’ of students competing for jobs (The Economist 2010), writing – and publication in particular – has emerged as the best known bet to secure a permanent academic position. It now seems older questions about doctoral writing may have been replaced, by a growing list of them: will I finish ‘on time’? How can I maximise outputs? Which journal is most highly ranked? Is it ISI listed? What’s the impact factor? And crucially, will the paper come out before I graduate so I can put it on my CV?
The boundaries I seek to exert pressure on in this chapter are those which have emerged around the study of emotion in higher education, and postgraduate supervision. It is my argument that existing work could be extended by a consideration of affective practice (Wetherell 2012). I believe that taking up Margaret Wetherell’s work could better resource higher education researchers for the task of attending to the patterning, and social circulation of affect. It might also prompt a shift from previous work, which has tended to either construe the emotional as absent or improper, in the classical Cartesian view of educating an “autonomous rational person” (Lynch 2010: 59), or more latterly, a somewhat sparse palette of feelings located in the individual. In sum, I believe that taking up affective practice could invigorate the study of doctoral education, and contribute to the de-pathologisation, and de-individualisation of emotions within it.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, I will briefly review the ways in which higher education researchers have understood, and worked with affect. Next, I introduce Wetherell’s (2012) development of affective practice, with its linked concepts of flow, pattern, and power. Following this, I introduce my own doctoral study. I present an analysis that focuses on one case of a third-year doctoral student. Using the conceptual framework of affective practice, I explore the patterning of affect in this student’s account, and discuss what such a patterning might reveal about contemporary practices of doctoral education. I conclude the article with reflections on the implications of this discussion for the practice of doctoral supervision.

An affective turn in higher education?
In recent years there has been an “affective turn” across the humanities and social sciences (Clough 2007). This ‘turn’ manifests as – and has itself manifested – a significant uptake in interest in the emotional as an object of study, as well as increasing attention to new epistemological and ontological questions that have arisen with it. It has seen the emergence of new edited books, journal special issues, conferences and scholarly journals (Davidson, Smith, Bondi & Probyn 2008). Importantly, for the purposes of this chapter, a review of recent research in higher education demonstrates a growth of articles that take up the vocabularies this turn including ‘emotion’, ‘passion’, ‘feeling’ and ‘affect’. Yet what seems to be missing at this stage of the conversation, is an engagement with questions about how qualitative researchers might seek to trace affect, and what it might mean for the kinds of tools we take up to analyse it.

The first characterisation I would make of the field of higher education is that empirical research on the emotions remains thin on the ground. There are relatively few studies that have an explicit focus on doctoral emotions (exceptions to this include: Aitchison & Mowbray 2013; Cotterall 2013; Herman 2008). At the conceptual level however, there have been lively debates within the field about the appropriateness and potential consequences of a focus on the emotional (Hey 2011; Ecclestone 2010; Ecclestone & Hayes 2009; Leathwood & Hey 2009). Existing studies have tended to take up a defensive orientation, in order to assert that the emotional is indeed a legitimate, and interesting object of social inquiry. While there has been an increase in interest in the emotions and bodies of higher education subjects, in general this work has tended to construct affects as psychological states experienced by the individual. Frequently, the emotional is pathologised, with a focus on particular ‘negative’ and intense affects that may be diagnosed and addressed. In this chapter I am proposing an
alternative approach, which might resist the individualisation and pathologisation of doctoral emotions. For example, rather than reading so-called negative affects such as depression or shame as individual maladies, I am interested in how these affective scenes might instead be described and interpreted as in social circulation, and as a consequence relational, economic and political. This requires a movement away from the restricted palette of emotions that are so often taken up in studies that use the conceptual tools of psychology. I am more interested in addressing the complexity of affective performances, scenes and events. This requires the ability to attend to more subtle emotional scenes such as schadenfreude (Magner 2008) or mixed ones like ‘cruel optimism’ (Berlant 2011) which such restricted palettes fail to observe.

A second and related issue is that a dichotomy of affects is often established – with some emotions rendered ‘positive’ (such as happiness, pride, relief etc.) and others as ‘negative’ (such as anger, anxiety, guilt, shame, envy, disgust etc.). Recent queer theoretical work on affect has shown the limitations of such a dichotomy, and has argued for the critical possibilities of working with ‘negative’ affects, rather than refusing, or seeking to transform them (Ngai 2005; Halperin & Traub 2009; Halberstam 2011;). A final characterisation I would make of current studies relates to their analytic approach to affective phenomena. Many studies attempt to trace affect through first and second person speech acts (such as ‘I’m embarrassed’ or ‘You’re angry’). However, this has little congruence with the unannounced ways affect plays out in everyday life. What is required is a movement towards considering affective accounts through scenes, events and figures instead. Such a change in approach might also address the current tendency to focus on the dramatic, extreme and unusual rather than more mundane and quotidian experiences, which may be characterised by more
“fleeting, equivocal and muddled” affective scenes (Wetherell 2012: 43). In sum, I argue a new approach to affect in higher education is called for; one which can deal with specific affective phenomena, and trace their consequences. It is to one such promising approach that I turn next.

A new approach: Affective practice

The material I am mobilising to make my argument is drawn from a recent book by Margaret Wetherell called *Affect and emotion: A new social science understanding* (2012). In this work, Wetherell focuses on finding a pragmatic route for thinking about affect and emotion for social research, especially for researchers drawing on empirical material. For Wetherell, affect displays “strong pushes for pattern” (2012:13) and can be best explained and understood using the existing social science research platform of ‘practice’. According to Wetherell a focus on affective practice draws attention to processes of “developmental sedimentation, routines of emotional regulation, relational patterns and ‘settling’ whereby multiple sources of activation and information about body states, situations, past experiences, linguistic forms, flowering thought...become woven together” (Wetherell 2012:12). Three lines of approach are at the core of affective practice: flow, practice and power.

The first is flow. According to Wetherell, we must understand the body as a dynamic “flow immersed in other flows” (2012:31). As such, the affective activity located in our body, is constantly being constituted and reconstituted. Wetherell argues that the flow of affect may become organised, or ‘effloresce’ with varying durations. For example, we can understand “flow” by noticing how one affect
such as a panic, might emerge rapidly as we remember our looming supervision meeting, it may press upon our attention, only to peter out minutes later – whereas other affective phenomena such as anxiety might be experienced as enduring background feelings, or ‘atmospheres’.

The second foundational concept of affective practice concerns the patterning of affect. Wetherell argues that affectivities are practices, which may be interwoven with somatic, neural, phenomenological, discursive, relational, cultural, economic, developmental, and historical patterns to form ‘ruts’ (Wetherell 2012). These ruts cut into the “social psychological life” of a community, becoming habit (Wetherell 2012:14). By taking affect as a practice, we can trace these patterns across a site or an institution, or widen our focus to examine the “affective citation” (Wetherell 2012:23) that subjects re-enact across a social category, or historical period.

The third foundational concept of her rubric is power. Wetherell argues that global political issues, histories, and identities are often refracted through “domestic, ordinary and wearing affective routines” (2012:7). This prompts her to ask questions about the regulation of affect, its uneven distribution and value. For example, who can take up what affective subject position? And, how does affective value come to be assigned to some figures, and not others? A key word above is “ordinary”. For Wetherell, it is “ordinary demotic, affective action – which typically proceeds with little meta-commentary, self-awareness or reflexive fuss – which needs to be grasped” (Wetherell 2012:78). This has resonances with an archive of scholarship in cultural studies which has attended to “ordinary” affects (Stewart 2007) and traumas (Cvetkovich 2003) or quotidian practices (Jagose 2010).
While some scholars have embraced the ‘affective turn’ because it offers a turn against discourse, in Wetherell’s rubric the key concepts of discourse analysis remain useful. Combining aspects of discourse analysis with affective practice might encourage us to ask: what affective position or stance is this person taking up to describe events from? What broader discourses and cultural subject positions may be evident? And, what kinds of emotional characters are being formulated from moment to moment in the narratives being told? (Wetherell 2003, 2012). In the following section, I attempt to use Wetherell’s rubric of affective practice to analyse two passages generated from my own doctoral study.

**Catherine’s writing diary: ‘Managing’ to keep calm and carry on: Introducing empirical research**

The empirical material I am drawing on comes from a study with ten doctoral students in the faculties of humanities and social sciences at a research-intensive university in Aotearoa New Zealand. In generating data I have been guided by a desire to better account for the affective experiences of doctoral writers, with an emphasis on producing an integrated reading of doctoral affect. Data has been generated during 2013 using participant writing diaries, a residential writing retreat and semi-structured interviews. By taking up this set of methods I have sought to generate material about both the domestic and ordinary affective routines of writing, as well as the sense-making that students apply to what it feels like to write and be(come) a doctoral writer. I chose to recruit students in the arts/humanities and education, as research suggests that these students experience higher rates of attrition (Cohen 2006) and are less likely to achieve
standard doctoral writing outcomes, such as publication (Kamler & Thomson 2008). Rather than ‘giving voice’ to the stories of people as individual agents, I am using these accounts to understand the constitution of ‘doctoral subjects’ – that is, the series of affective positions these students inhabit.

For this paper I have selected a single case, using just one of the methods of the larger study – the doctoral writing diary. I asked each participant to keep a diary over several months to record the actions, habits, and affective textures of their writing practice. In my instructions to participants, I asked them to pay attention to the ordinary rituals and routines of their writing, what they do at various times of the day, week or month, as well as any experiences that seemed unusual. Participants were asked to record their embodied experience, where they are, and what it felt like. In selecting this particular case, I do not claim it is representative of the stories of other doctoral students. Rather, the account I present is intended to demonstrate how using affective practice as a framework combined with some tools from discourse analysis, can generate distinctive understandings of affect and doctoral writing practices.

**Introducing Catherine**

Catherine (pseudonym) is a student in the third year of her PhD. She was the most prolific diary writer in the study, completing fourteen entries over a two-month period, and generating a total of over 7,500 words. Catherine’s diary entries ranged from short sketches of the shifting landscape of her emotions throughout her working day, to longer entries that explored how particular ‘writerly’ events such as publication, or peer review felt, or how particular
feelings such as rage seemed to effloresce. For this paper I have selected passages from Catherine’s second and third diary entries, which are included below:

**Writing journal 25-02-2013**

Today I managed to start writing my methodology section. I procrastinated no longer and I started writing. This process is perhaps a little more like crafting as I have three things that I have written already about my methodology. So I can recycle. This somehow makes it feel less daunting. It isn’t easy to bring the three together as each have different purposes and use different analytic frames and metaphors, but somehow I feel better starting already close to my word count target of 10-12,000 words. I have set myself the target of writing 1,000 words a day, or 500 in a half day. I do this to try and motivate myself, but also to get some sense of achievement from the writing that can feel like tiny slow steps.

Before I start, and in the early stages, I distract myself with some planning. I write my to do list for the week. I haven’t done this since January but it now feels like I have too much to do to just rely on my intuition to manage my time. I have seven things to write, including two chapters, four papers and a workshop. That makes me feel quite scared and so I then start to break these down into numbers of words and how much I can write in a given time and this makes me feel better, it feels more manageable broken down like this. I have a nice plan for my thesis for the first time, I can add this to the increasing number of things being taped to the walls around my desk…

**Writing journal 28-02-2013**

…My writing has not really gone as I optimistically planned at the start of the week. I have not met my target of 500 words each half day and have even spent extra time in the evenings to try and catch up, but still not met my target. The first issue is that I end up going back over and rewriting what I have written the previous day, I can waste a lot of time honing this as it is easier than starting a new section. I need to stop this habit. I also suddenly got uncertain about some of the theory I was using and felt like I
needed to go back and re-read a lot of material to clarify this. Finally I got stuck on whether I needed to make one point before I could move on to the point I really wanted to make. This is the difficulty I think with my way of writing, I don’t have a rigid plan and like to let the shape and direction evolve (mutate) as I write, but sometimes this means I either write something that later is not relevant or I get stuck trying to get somewhere, I write myself off on a tangent or into a corner.

The figure of the rational emotion manager

The fragments above are unlikely to be identified as ‘emotional’ in any common sense of the word. The text may read as relatively ordinary and mundane; a doctoral student set a writing goal, and subsequently failed to meet it. It is my argument that it the banality of this material is precisely what makes it important, and so interesting to examine. I have a hunch that focusing on ordinary episodes like this might even help researchers to illuminate the consequences of similarly ordinary phenomena, such as a culture of audit and precarious labour conditions that are weaved throughout the scene of doctoral education. I will use Wetherell’s work, which I introduced earlier, to help me make a preliminary analytic sketch of Catherine’s two diary entries.

From a close reading of the texts I suggest that Catherine repeatedly took up the subject position of the writing manager. Indeed, she used the word ‘manage’ three times in the first extract. To manage her writing Catherine used a number of strategies commonly called for in doctoral advice texts and writing workshops, including chapter word counts, daily word targets, to-do lists, and planning in order to ‘manage’ her workload. In the position of the writing manager Catherine is able to assess her own performance. While her “optimism” in setting the word count goal had not been realised, and she failed to meet her goals, and “manage”
her writing, as a writing manager Catherine was able to diagnose her writing challenges. She identified “issues” and “difficulties” to address (e.g. re-writing and honing) and “habits” to discontinue. There is a moral value attached to enacting these strategies. Catherine marked herself as a disciplined writer, even if she failed to meet her own word targets. We might read this scene as evidence of a technology of self that brings into being the self-monitoring and responsibilised “good-student” idealised by the neoliberal university (Grant 1997).

Using Wetherell’s framework, I’d like to go beyond what Catherine told us about her writing practice, to also look for affective practices in the text. We might describe the scene of Catherine’s writing practice as a swirling affective soup, involving feelings of engulfment, anxiety, fear and frustration. Interestingly, Catherine repeatedly moved to not only manage her writing, but also to manage her affects, by taking up the affective subject position of the emotion manager. In taking on this affective subject position, Catherine constituted herself as a student who is able to diagnose her own writing challenges, and ameliorate various negative affects. We can see her take up this affective subject position at least twice through the text. If we look at this sentence, we can see the pattern most clearly:

I have seven things to write, including two chapters, four papers and a workshop. That makes me feel quite scared and so I then start to break these down into numbers of words and how much I can write in a given time and this makes me feel better, it feels more manageable broken down like this.
The underlined text at the beginning gives us clues to the context of Catherine’s labour. This heavy workload suggests an affective scene of engulfment, and as Catherine noted herself, her fear of the “daunting” task of writing two chapters, four journal articles and a workshop. This amount of writing “isn’t easy”. But we also need to examine what Catherine did as these affects emerged. She “breaks” things down “into numbers of words” and “how much I can write in a given time”. It could be argued that this breaking down is not only about numbers and words – it also appears to be a form of breaking down feelings of engulfment and fear. Indeed, Catherine “feels better” once words, numbers and feelings are dismantled in this way. This affective performance is very reminiscent of the ‘Keep Calm and Carry On’ meme that is so emblematic in our current cultural milieu, structured as it is by wars, austerity, and other crises. Catherine carries on, managing these affects with the strategies identified above, but also through engaging alternative affective practices of calmness, penitence and even bravery.

In examining how Catherine took up the affective subject position of the emotion manager I would like to make full use of the potential meanings of ‘management’. In the first sense, Catherine appeared to ‘manage’ her affect by being a manager – a person in charge, a leader or commander. She is a self-manager, in the way that academics and doctoral students are now supposed to be, as autonomous and self-regulating academic workers (Gill 2009). Catherine can manage, or control her writing, and also manage her affects. This meaning seems to connect to existing work produced around emotion management in the workplace which has illuminated the way in which emotion is often rendered as an oppositional narrative to the valued position of reasoned professionalism (Dougherty & Drumheller 2006). Higher education work in this vein has tended to identify the ways in which academics control and contain their emotions in culturally
accepted ways given the tacit ‘feeling rules’ of the academy (Bloch 2002). Yet, there are other ways in which we might read Catherine’s emotion management. Catherine also seemed to ‘manage’ her affects in an instrumental sense, by accomplishing, achieving or bringing about writing. By this I mean, writing is something that she managed to do, at least sometimes. The third meaning of management is the one I am most interested in pursuing in this remainder of this chapter. It is a meaning that is perhaps most easily conveyed through a question, such as: ‘will you be able to manage without it?’ This is managing as coping, making do, carrying on, muddling through, or surviving. This kind of management, particularly the notion of ‘surviving’ the PhD is a variation on a remarkably prevalent cultural and educational narrative (For example, each of these postgraduate advice texts uses the word ‘survivor’ in its title: Karp 2009; Mathiesen & Binder 2009; Murray 2009; Rittner & Trudeau 1997; Chakrabarty 2012; Hume 2005; Waring & Kearins 2011).

To understand this better I suggest that we need to pay close attention to the clues we have about Catherine’s context. Catherine constituted herself as “worried” and “scared” as well as “stuck” and “procrastinating”. She “beats herself up” about “bad academic habits”, which she states were highlighted in feedback received from reviewers of a journal article she recently submitted. If we read her affective scene alongside the context of her academic labour, we remember that Catherine was not only writing her thesis, but was simultaneously working on publishing four separate papers and delivering a workshop. Catherine’s affective scene may be described as one of engulfment, she appeared overwhelmed with writing responsibilities. Given this heavy workload, it is no wonder that the temporalities of her life were being governed by work “[I] have even spent extra time in the evenings to try and catch up, but
still not met my target”. In her first diary entry on February 14th 2013, Catherine noted that so much writing hurt:

I have had problems with my right shoulder over these past two years and so I am trying to find ways to reduce the strain on it. I use my left hand to operate the mouse now and I use speech to text when I use my laptop at home.

There is some consistency between Catherine’s diary, the accounts of other participants in my cohort, and my own experience as a doctoral student. It is not just that observations about workload, and arguments about planning and discipline are often repeated; it appears there is also the repetition of a certain relation to affect. If we return to Wetherell for a moment, we could argue that Catherine’s ‘rational emotion management’ is normatively organised as a part of socially recognised affective practices. This means that Catherine’s calm and ‘responsible’ management of her writing and emotional performance was not random, nor the result of some sort of innate biological drive toward calmness, and order – instead, its meaning is composed from the patterning of her ordinary activities.

My interpretation here is also consistent with Aitchison and Mowbray’s (2013) work on the emotional management of doctoral women. Like in Catherine’s case, these authors found that doctoral students sought to channel their affects toward so-called productive writing behaviours. They identify the supervisor-student relationship as a site where the ‘feeling rules’ (Hochschild 1983) of the academy are enacted with great care. In order to maintain face when receiving feedback, students recounted attempts to act “as they imagined was expected” remaining “calm, objective and rational” and “disciplin[ing] their emotions” (Aitchison &
If we return to Wetherell’s (2012) rubric on affect, we can begin to see how the ‘affective flow’ of Catherine’s excerpt can be read as articulating within extensive social changes, including neoliberal transformations of higher education.

**Writing, affect and the precarity of academic labour**

To explore this further it is helpful to introduce an emerging body of research focused on the contemporary conditions of academic labour (Sparkes 2007; Pelias 2004; Gill 2010; Burrows 2012; Thatcher 2012). An increasing number of these scholars have identified ‘precariousness’ as one of the defining features of contemporary academic life – particularly for younger, or ‘early career’ academics, a claim which I, and others (Prasad 2013) have extended to doctoral students as well. Common features of precarious academic labour include: an increase of temporary contact jobs; anxiety in finding and keeping work; poor pay; long hours; the muddying of boundaries between work and home; high levels of mobility; and, passionate attachments to work, and the identity of being an ‘academic’ (Gill 2010). This precarity can be clearly felt by doctoral students in Aotearoa New Zealand, with the rapid and rather brutal postgraduate education policy changes implemented by the National-led government in 2012-2013. These included the crippling of student unions through the passing of voluntary student membership legislation, and the abolition of the postgraduate student allowance, even for students partway through study.

I believe that writing is a helpful site to examine the affective consequences of precarity. As a number of scholars have noted, it appears that the performative technologies that audit and evaluate writing are associated with particular
affective figurations (Burrows 2012; Gill 2009). It may be then no surprise that Catherine is feeling anxious and overwhelmed. Her institution expects her to submit her PhD thesis ‘on time’. This has been clear from the first days of her enrolment. Catherine has been tracked, and is expected to meet certain ‘progress’ goals within a specified time-scale, with the threat of a suspension of her stipend should she fail to meet, or even report on these goals. The ‘on-time’ submission itself is not one that has been negotiated by Catherine and her supervisors, in recognition of the particular needs of her doctoral research – it is a standard timescale established by the institution and ‘managed’ by administrative staff, her academic supervisors, and, as I have shown here, Catherine herself. This timescale responds to the reality that The Government will not fund the institution for Catherine’s enrolment past the time allotted, unless there have been exceptional circumstances during her candidature. Indeed, Catherine herself will be without the income of her doctoral stipend if her study extends beyond three and a half years. She will be expected to pay tuition fees, and her supervisors will come under increasing pressure to swiftly ‘manage’ her completion.

Yet, as blogs, advice texts or academic job advertisements reveal, finishing a PhD may not be enough to pursue an academic career. In order to create an employable ‘CV self’ Catherine is also expected to ‘manage’ to publish a ‘reasonable’ amount of peer-reviewed papers. This is an expectation felt especially by candidates seeking to enter the competitive academic employment markets of the Global North, given the ways in which publication is now used to measure both personal and institutional performance. A number of authors have argued that this fetish for publication metrics (Larsson 2009) has been internalised by academics, and emerges as a “reflexive surveillance of the self”
Feelings about our own sense of worth and intellectual value seem to have become coupled with the abstract performance levels implied by these measurements. Indeed, many of us may have overheard, or ourselves felt the pride and satisfaction of ‘measuring up’, but I suggest that this may come at the expense of other ways of feeling about writing. We might read the beginnings of this too in Catherine’s account – it is accomplishing the word count itself that is reported as the “achievement” and the “tiny slow step”, rather than other aspects of her writing development.

If academic writing has come to represent our value and worth as (future) academic workers, it is no wonder that many students feel under pressure to write. But crucially, it seems that this pressure is often experienced as individual and private. This is a result of what Gill (2010: 240) refers to as the “individualising discourse” of academic labour:

[it] devours us like a flesh-eating bacterium producing its own toxic waste – shame: I’m a fraud, I’m useless, I’m nothing. It is deeply gendered, racialised, classed, and connected to biographies that produce very different degrees of entitlement. Some may conclude that they aren’t good enough, but others have already devised solutions: I must try harder, read more, understand theory better, and so on, the solution for us ‘good’ neoliberal subjects is simply to work even harder.

Gill asks us to think how the ‘failures’ of writing are viewed as moral failures which attach to the academic, or in this case, the doctoral student. This is an affective performance of disappointment in the self. We can note the self-blame runs through Catherine’s diary, and the way she draws on the language of pathology. In her three diary entries Catherine describes herself as “distracted”, “procrastinating” and practicing “bad habits”. She addresses these bad habits
with the penitence of writing at home in order to “catch up”. For Gill and Pratt, her affective practices of personal responsibility, management and self-blame might best be seen as “toxic, individualised but thoroughly structural feature[s]” of the neoliberal university (2008:23). Indeed, Catherine and many other doctoral students, myself included, are encouraged into these affective positions by a whole assemblage of work on writing, from advice texts, writing blogs, and writing workshops run by higher education institutions.

Altogether, these critical takes on contemporary academic labour are important for the study of doctoral emotion. By connecting particular patterns of feeling with the increasing precarity (Gill 2009) and metricization (Burrows 2012) of academic labour, these scholars open up questions of social justice. They encourage us to think against discourses which individualise emotions as the responsibility of the ‘professional’ scholar, and instead talk about employment conditions which lead to “affective crisis” (Burrows 2012). In the remainder of this chapter I will advance some possible responses that supervisors might consider in their work alongside doctoral students.

**What might this mean for practices of supervision?**

In line with the arguments I have made above, doctoral supervisors might seek to perform a number of interruptions. The first could be to play their part in dismantling the idea of the ‘aristocracy’ of doctoral labour (Leung et al 2010). This frames scholarship as a noble vocation, and has the effect of muting discussion about financial compensation, job security and labour conditions. Another potentially profitable route may be to encourage doctoral students to form collectives. This could take shape as either ad hoc support groups, or more
organised unions, such as the development of the Postgraduate Workers Association in the UK (Thatcher 2012). Such collectives can move to resist economic exploitation of postgraduate students, and proliferate counter discourses, which resist attempts to individualise responsibility for the problems caused by institutional and national policies and global economic forces. I am also rather fond of the technologies of resistance suggested by Leung and colleagues (2010). These include: a politics of extravagant, outrageous and creative whining; an ethics of slowness; collaborative work and alternative publication strategies (Leung et al 2010). Supervisors might engage important questions with their students directly such as: why is it that any emotional burdens of writing seem to be shouldered by the individual student? Or, are the ‘go-getting’ feelings of passion and enthusiasm the best, or only available affective practices for ‘good’ doctoral writing practice?

**Conclusion**

The integrated rubric of affective practice provides researchers with helpful tools to examine the affective lives of our higher education communities. In this paper I have paid particular attention to one affective performance by a participant – Catherine. I have argued that an important affective subject position taken up by Catherine is the rational emotion manager. I tentatively argue, that the layering, and re-layering of this relation to affect has solidified and become habit. And even more tentatively, I suggest that this layering might not be anchored to Catherine alone, or even the particular institutional site of my research – but it may apply more broadly to the figure of the doctoral student across a number of places. I am proposing that we can see particular kinds of emotional subjects becoming repetitively constituted in and through doctoral education. This seems
to invite a number of other questions, such as who can take up the affective subject position evident in Catherine’s excerpt? And, how might this have changed over the past decades? While it seems to be stubborn, how might it be moveable? Rather than managing to Keep Calm and Carry On, could Catherine mis-manage her writing and affect in order to Raise Hell and Change the World?

In concluding I would like to advance a modest claim; considering affective practice may be helpful for future studies of doctoral supervision. Using Wetherell’s ideas might enable researchers of supervision to consider why some people invest in particular affective subject positions and performances rather than others. For doctoral students, and supervisors this could open up new pathways for appreciating our affects. Indeed, identifying the affective patterns that have congealed around our writing practices might enable us to question whether they continue to work for us, or not. We might even feel encouraged to explore affective figurations that are not yet imagined.

References

Karp J. 2009. How to survive your PhD: The insider’s guide to avoiding mistakes, choosing the right programme, working with professors, and just how a person actually writes a 200-page paper. Naperville: Sourcebooks Inc.
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APPENDIX G

Doctoral writing retreat programme
Regular activities
Arrival, setting up writing spaces
Lunch, introductions of selves & projects, programme overview

Writing activities

DAY 1
11:00 AM
1:30 PM
5:00 PM
1:30 PM
5:00 PM
1:30 PM
5:00 PM

I: Quiet writing time
II: Group art-making:
Reflecting on our writing

Pot-luck dinner
6:00 PM
7:00 PM

III: Work-in-progress presentations

End of day
8:30 PM

DAY 2
7:00 AM
8:00 AM
10:00 AM
8:00 AM
10:00 AM
8:00 AM
10:00 AM

I: Quiet writing time
IV: Pair interviewing & group sculpture activity
II: Group art-making: Real & ideal

Lunch
12:30 PM
5:00 PM

III: Work-in-progress presentations

End of day
8:30 PM

DAY 3
7:00 AM
8:00 AM
11:30 AM
8:00 AM
11:30 AM
8:00 AM
11:30 AM

I: Quiet writing time
IV: Peer review of drafts

Lunch
12:30 PM
1:30 PM

V: Reflection

Pack up and wrap up
2:30 PM

End of day, transport back to city
3:30 PM

Note: There are five types of writing activities (I: Quiet writing time, II: Group art-making, III: Work-in-progress presentations, IV: Pair activities, and V: Reflection)