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Perspectives: Writing and supervising trauma narrative in tertiary studies

Abstract:

Much has been written on differing paradigms of supervisor and Higher Degree Research candidate relationship, particularly at the doctoral level. According to the literature, varying models of supervision result in varying experiences but a consistent thread within the comparatively newer discipline of creative practices in Australia is a desire to understand this relationship and develop a uniform quality assurance.

But this paper argues that different types of candidate work within creative practices entails different types of supervision. We arrive at this statement experientially through a supervisory/student relationship spanning two degrees and four to five years, interrogating notions of grief and death, framed by trauma.

In the final year of a doctorate, we instigated a mini lateral research project, looking at our own practice, as both supervisor and candidate. Within the qualitative frame of narrative inquiry, we individually devised a set of questions, and undertook to rigorously investigate how the other regards the process we have been living for the past four years. In a bid to both articulate and then reflect upon this relationship, we hope in some small way to contribute to the growing canon within the creative practices on supervisor/candidate relationships, particularly pertinent to the writing and supervision of trauma narrative.

Biographical notes:

Sue Joseph (PhD) has been a journalist for more than thirty five years, working in Australia and the UK. She began working as an academic, teaching print journalism at the University of Technology, Sydney in 1997. She now teaches journalism and creative writing, particularly creative non-fiction writing, in both undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Her research interests are around sexuality, secrets and confession, framed by

the media; HIV and women; ethics, trauma; reflective professional practice; and Australian creative non-fiction. Her third book, *Speaking Secrets* (Alto Books), was published recently; she is currently writing her fourth book on Australian creative non-fiction authors.

Freya Latona is in the final year of her PhD at UTS. Her non-traditional doctorate explores grief memoir, with a particular focus on how we write about the deaths of our mothers. Her thesis includes a creative writing element, having composed her own memoir about losing her mother as a nineteen year old. An earlier version of this memoir was awarded The Guy Morrison Prize for Literary Journalism. Freya's other research interests include bibliotherapy; the process of journalling grief and its transition to narrative memoir; and the 'epiphany' in grief writing, which recently published in The British Sociological Association's 'Auto/Biography' annual journal 2014. Freya is currently living in London and enjoying linking up with the life writing academic community across the UK.

Keywords: memoir; trauma narrative; death; grief; supervisor/candidate relationship; narrative enquiry

Introduction

Differing models of the supervisor and Higher Degree Research (HDR) candidate relationship have been the focus of more and more academic interest, particularly at the doctoral level (Grant 2005; Brien and Williamson 2009; Dibble and van Loon 2004; Kroll and Finlayson 2012; Halse and Bansel 2012; Kroll 2013; Webb, Brien and Burr 2013). According to the literature, varying models of supervision result in varying experiences but a consistent thread within the comparatively newer discipline of creative practices is a desire to understand this relationship and develop a uniform quality assurance, both in supervision and examination.

But this paper further argues that as well as a push for uniform quality assurance, there must be acknowledgement that different types of candidate work within creative practices entails different types of supervision. We arrive at this statement experientially through a supervisory/candidate relationship spanning two degrees and four years, interrogating notions of grief and death, framed by trauma.

This paper has its genesis in the burgeoning of narrative trauma within creative Higher Research Degrees both in Australia and abroad. Borrowing from Grant (2005), we have opted to explore the ‘private’ arena of the supervisor and candidate at length, drawing on our own devised narrative inquiry; we set out to investigate the supervisor/candidate relationship from different perspectives. Throughout the past four to five years, a working relationship has developed that was meant to be productive, effective, and illuminating. But was it? And how exactly was the therapeutic aspect of the supervision conducted and received? We had never really analysed the pedagogy surrounding our working relationship in relation to the trauma narrative.

It must be flagged early on that the research in question here was the candidate’s interrogation of herself as both a subject of trauma narrative and the teller of trauma narrative. Her work has grown through an initial Honours year, researching the death of her mother and her response to that death, both internally and externally; expanding into a greater work of life-writing throughout her PhD studies, developing the parameters of her earlier research to incorporate more fully grief and death as notions. We will be referring from here on in to the ‘supervisor’ and the ‘candidate’, for ease of reading.

Discussion

Grant talks about how we have come ‘to understand and perform ourselves as supervisors and students’ (Grant 2005: 339). Her research goes on to embed itself in four differing discourses: the psychological, the traditional-academic, the techno-scientific and the neo-liberal (Grant 2005: 340). And she discusses these through narrative inquiry (private data) and the literature (public data). Devising a mini-lateral research project during the supervision period, the main aim of our process was to open discussion about not just what we had been doing for the past five years, but *how* we had been doing it. We have used Grant’s ‘private’ data mode through question and answer interviews. We did not discuss questions with each other prior to the interviews, and have retained both the question and the answers within the body of this paper.

We have also borrowed from Lee (2008), and Halse and Bansel (2012). Lee identifies five concepts pertinent to supervision goals: functional; enculturation; critical thinking; emancipation; relationship development (Lee 2008: 268). We have focused on the fifth – relationship development. The reason this paper looks at this fifth and final concept set out by Lee is because a basic premise of our work together is that supervising candidates researching trauma writing through life writing is different to supervising candidates not writing trauma narrative, particularly regarding the minimisation of self-harm. Halse and Bansel identify four paradigms which have historically framed doctoral supervision. They are: apprenticeship, person-centred, scientific-technical and sociocultural. Again, we have borrowed the most pertinent to our own relationship – person-centred – and argue that in narrative trauma, this is the only paradigm with ethical underpinnings (Halse and Bansel 2012: 378) as it lends itself to a space where the minimisation of self-harm can/should be one of the first concepts discussed. The ‘person-centred’ paradigm places ‘the personal attributes, roles, behavioural styles and subject formation of the supervisor and/or student as central to the work of doctoral supervision’ (Halse and Bansel 2012: 380). Unfortunately, ‘the person-centred paradigm occupies an ambivalent place in the field of doctoral supervision’ as it is regarded as ‘limited’ in its value to the improvement of doctoral supervision mainly because of its reductive property (Halse and Bansel 2012: 382). Obversely, in terms of trauma narrative, we would argue that this reductionist property is the most crucial of paradigms simply because of its potential as a bespoke space.

Heath writes that the success of the supervisor/candidate positions the supervisor as someone: ‘who must provide the time, expertise and support to foster the candidate’s research skills and attitudes, and to ensure the production of a thesis of acceptable standard’ (Heath 2002: 41). Kroll writes: ‘Supervisors should help to identify what knowledge and skills are needed as well as to secure appropriate resources to maximise academic and career opportunities’ (Kroll 2013: 4).

Our contention is that the supervisor of life writing within trauma narrative must also ensure the psychic health of the candidate, inasmuch as it pertains to the process of the candidature; anything less than this is unethical. In other words, commodifying trauma narrative within a tertiary institution without appropriate framework and safety strategies can constitute a dangerous psychic space, not only for the candidate but through vicarious trauma, also the supervisor (Joseph and Rickett 2010).

From this earlier work, a pedagogical model was developed, and added to as its application was attempted. The earlier work ascertained that there is a strong case for developing a universal model of supervision where the ethical framework of safeguards is constantly expanded. Further research underlined that ‘individual students come with identifiable individual constraints and needs and these constraints and needs engender and demand bespoke responses’ (Joseph 2012). This makes it clear that the model can never be static but must be applied purely as a starting point and tailored accordingly on an individual level. The current model includes:

- a formal support network to help manage self-harm, including available counselling for the student and the academic;
- a system of mentoring from or co-supervision with more senior academics, with direct experience of supervising creative projects involving potential harm for both student and supervisor;
- an appropriate process to address issues face to face with possibly vulnerable students who insist on revisiting traumatic memory creatively;
- formal debriefing processes when and where necessary for both student and academic;
- preliminary supervisory consultation with any other lecturers/tutors who may be handling this work, outside of the supervisor/student relationship (Joseph and Rickett 2010; Joseph 2013).

The research of this particular candidate lent itself well to application of the fledgling model above. The interview that follows attempts to interrogate if there was a positive outcome. This interview has been edited and forms a shortened version of the full length research results, which will be analysed and published at a later date, but are shaping up to perhaps form a sixth point in the model above – conducting a qualitative, short dual interview session, interrogating each other’s perspective on specificities of the supervisor/candidate relationship.

The Interviews:¹

Supervisor to candidate

Q: When you first walked into my office in 2009 with that scrap of paper with Chinese/alternative medicine scribbled on it, did you have any idea that what you really wanted to be writing about was your mother?

A: I can’t say that I consciously wanted to write about my mother... but ...what was on the scrap of paper was I wanted to research – alternative therapy in Australia. Yes. And then you didn’t really like the ideas – they were not real ideas and I got offended; I had just met you. And then you said, ‘What’s going on?’ And I explained...

Q: I remember you said to me, ‘I had a really hard time in my undergraduate degree,’ and then you very simply told me that your Mum had died almost a year ago to the day you were in my office?

A: I think I remember you saying something really simply which was, ‘Why don’t you write about that?’ or ‘Would you want to write about that?’ But it was so direct and so disarming and so sensitive really; I think you could see it, you picked something u And then it was like a huge release physically and I just said yes.

Q: You arrived in my office one day about four months into your Honours year and you said you could not write it anymore. I thought the psychic injury had become too much; instead, your dilemma was writing *without* your mother’s approval or permission; without your deceased

mother's approval. We devised an epistolary thread to see if that helped. Can you explain how it helped you to keep writing or if it did?

A: I can't remember that day when I decided to do the epistolary thread, but I do remember thinking about it now how important it was and still is really to the work now that it's a Doctorate.

Q: Do you remember what you said to me the next time I saw you, because I checked in with you about how it was going? You said it was like writing *with* her rather than about her. The relief; your body, your eyes, everything just changed.

A: I mean now I feel like I've written it with her: the whole thing. I actually think we're writing it together, without knowing how exactly that works...But it was really important that kind of suggestion to incorporate my mother into it.

Q: You said to me it was like she was a teacher and you were the student; just mother/daughter communicating at a very tough time, keeping each other up, saying some really strong emotional things to each other. And in a way now its testimonial.

A: I'm comfortable with it now but I do think still apart from the incorporation of the emails being a strategy for me to feel like she was writing it with me, I still feel like it's never going to be ethically 100 percent okay to publish someone else's writing, and particular emails are very personal.

Q: Which is my next question; from an ethical point of view did the epistolary thread with emails and letters from your mother woven throughout your text completely alleviate that feeling of writing without her permission?

A: No, no, and it's never going to be 100 percent and I think that's with all memoir. I vacillate between feeling like I've exposed her too much, and then not so much. I do have days when I panic about it. It'll always be like this.

Q: How hard was it to step from your Honours degree into your Doctoral degree and develop more deeply this distinctly painful and ongoing interrogation of grief and death?

A: It was really hard, it was horrible. I remember thinking I have nothing left to write, like I just have nothing left in me, and I don't think I was in a good place emotionally actually at that time.

Q: I think you launched yourself into the theoretical study of death?

A: I did. And that was actually my proposal to the faculty. The proposal looks nothing like what it is now, almost finished. The proposal didn't really talk about what I would do with my creative; it talked about this kind of thanatological exploration on death. Even though I had made leaps and bounds in the Honours degree and finding out how much writing as therapy works and things like that, and even though it was a success, it didn't quite translate over to the next degree.

Q: I'm interested in you saying you had nothing left to write. And how much have you written now?

A: I know, 100,000 words plus more...and it takes a separate tone, it's a different tone. I think I'm further away from it first and foremost and in a better emotional position, although not always; you don't have to be 100 percent emotionally okay. In fact, being upset sometimes can make the work quite raw and add things to it. But I do think making up that process of 500 words a day was the turning point completely.

Q: I think I said to you 'fragments, write fragments, that's what you do well'.

A: I remember thinking 500 words a day because it's about a page. And I can do it really quickly, so I did it really quickly. And that's the complete turning point, that's why this whole thing is possible, it's because I did it every day. And there is interesting philosophy behind the daily writing, just like there's philosophy behind daily exercise or daily anything. Apparently it's in the 'daily' that really makes a part of habit, but then it became like an outlet and a friend within about a week.

Q: So do you believe in writing as therapy now?

A: Yes. They have theories about writing being therapy; the studies say that writing is therapy when you create a narrative out of trauma. Listing and writing in fragments that don't have a narrative are not affective, that's what the studies say. What I say, in order to get to the narrative

of trauma you actually have to do fragments first, or kind of a more disjointed process, because that's the way trauma often presents itself. It's not a narrative at first, it can't be. I mean it's so common that people can't remember properly or have disjointed memory or false memory even. But it's through writing that you start to see the narrative in it – but you can't write a narrative at first, you sort of have to go through this process first. That's my theory.

Q: Which you've tested obviously?

A: Yes, and it kind of ties in with the psychology behind writing as therapy.

Q: Has the process of surrounding yourself with the literature and literally going to work each day and thinking about your mother made the pain worse or better? Because I think your conclusion in your Honours was that it didn't work for you.

A: I'd say no...I mean to go back to the writing as therapy, it did take a long time for me to realise that it worked. So what I learnt later was you really have to stick with it.

Q: I have co-developed a pedagogical model of supervision pertinent to trauma life writing and applied it to you from a very early stage of our supervisory relationship. You are aware that it entails checking in on a more personal aspect of the process of your Doctoral undertakings. Have you found this intrusive at any time, and I guess the next question; could/should I have delved more deeply? Supervising someone who's doing life writing framed by trauma is different to supervising someone who's not...

A: I personally have never found you intrusive. If I had found you intrusive I certainly wouldn't have come back for a Doctorate with you knowing that it would be another three and a bit years. And I think you've bridged the gap well for me between being personal enough. But I think that if you had pushed me further in terms of maybe a little bit more about my grief in kind of in-depth way and I sort of broke down in front of you consistently, I think that may not have helped me personally because I'm not a break-downer.

Q: To be honest I don't think I ever would do that because I don't have the skills to manage that. I would never really push anyone on their level of grief because that's not what I'm trying to do, I'm just trying to find out that you are surrounded by a therapeutic scaffold to hold you up while

you keep doing this. And I guess the other thing that I do is I check in a lot, I sort of try and be in contact a lot, which possibly is quite intrusive and boring. And I try and do it personally so I can see people's eyes when I ask certain questions just to see what they do. So finally, have you felt 'safe' while writing on your mother's death; or have you felt exposed and vulnerable? Have you felt in any way protected by the supervisory process?

A: I have felt both safe and unsafe. Having a supervisor like you has been an incredible gift. However, to have a supervisor also means that I am writing in the university context – I am more exposed this way than if I was just writing alone, for my own purposes. I guess I'm thinking about my dealings with other academics who clearly do not have training in handling students who are writing about personal and traumatic themes. I haven't dealt with them often, but when I have, it has actually been harmful. It's interesting because it's a great comparative tool, really. I can see the difference in how you deal with me and talk to me and how they do. So, yes. Protected by the supervisory process, but not by the larger university/departmental process.

Candidate to supervisor:

Q: This follows on from a question you had – what is your approach to supervising students who are writing about traumatic subjects?

A: I, with colleague Dr Carolyn Rickett, co-developed a model which I've since added to. It was a four point model. It's now a five point model. Basically the philosophy behind it is what we were talking about then. I believe that supervising someone who is life writing in trauma is a different pedagogy to supervising someone who's not and that you have to cross... a line that you would never cross in supervision pedagogy where there is no trauma narrative. I have to make sure there's a therapeutic scaffold around each person who comes to me who wishes to write in trauma narrative. I believe that the university has no right to commodify something like trauma narrative in a degree unless it is ethically handled. Unless a different model of supervision is put in place. As an academic I'm not skilled at all in how to handle medical trauma but I've done a lot of research on it and what I can do is work side by side with the people I hope my students have in this therapeutic scaffold, ie. a loving partner who gets it, a mum or a dad who gets it, a therapist seen regularly, psychiatrist, medications. I never ask about

medications but I'm figuring if someone's seeing a psychiatrist they've got meds and if they're seeing a psychologist they may have or may not have. It's the person, the scaffold and alliance around the candidate. So that I know when they're not with me and we're not talking they can go away, do their work and reach out for the help and I also say anytime, just tell me if it gets too hard.

Q: Well there's one really important thing that I think made me know I could write trauma narrative with you as a supervisor, which was you always made it really clear that you care more about the student than you do about their work.

A: But again this lends itself to my own personal philosophy or ethos around supervising trauma narrative. You've got to get skilled, but I don't mean medically. I can walk alongside paramedics that my students hopefully all have – and I do ask in the first session. So again I'm stepping over this huge personal line but I think it's necessary. If there's a trauma narrative inherent in the piece of writing that is personal or happened to someone they knew, as far as I'm concerned that's supervising trauma narrative whether it's fiction or non-fiction.

Q: That leads me to how you bridge the gap between acting as a traditional academic supervisor, which you have to do to get a work through in creative practices, and being this trauma supervisor. How do you ensure that the work is a publishable standard while being sensitive to a student's experiences?

A: It's a really good question, and the question really is: Am I there as a therapist? No I'm not. I am there as an academic practitioner who is working as an editor for publishable work. I'm definitely looking out for the academic rigor of both the exegetical material but also the creative rigor of the non-traditional component or the creative artefact. I try and build a relationship, which is above and beyond with each of my candidates in trauma narrative, of trust. So when I say to somebody, you really can't put that there, I'm open to negotiation. I will talk about it. It will be my opinion but if it's a strong one I'll really argue my position. Checking in on their eyes and their body language, all the time so that in my meagre knowledge I think they're alright.

Q: I'm going to ask you now about me. Has your approach in supervising me changed over the years?

A: You were the first student I had after a difficult supervisory experience and I never wanted to risk endangering a student's psyche again. I would rather step away from my job. I did take a risk with you and I sort of experimented on you but at the end of the day you always were more important than anything else, even when I didn't know you. At the end of the day your health, your psychic health is far more important to me. I hope you never left me feeling worse off. I'm sure you left pieces of writing feeling pretty ragged at times but that's my expectation that you would. That's the nature of trauma writing and that's where your therapeutic scaffold comes in. I would really question proceeding if a student didn't have the ability to reach out for help; I'd probably take it up with student health at the university and higher up in the graduate school if I thought a student was really in danger, psychically.

Q: I think partly why it worked well and is working well with us, is because you're a mother, and you can correct me if I'm wrong. You're a mother of daughters around my age and I was writing about the death of my mother and you had empathy which I could see was really palpable and still is. Was it ever difficult for you personally when reading my work? Did it put you in a position of vulnerability and this is a personal question but it may have affected you also as a mother because you're reading in depth kind of a musings of a daughter who's grieving hers?

A: Absolutely. I mean my heart, not as an academic, but as a mother, as a woman and a mother, went out to you. There's never been a time when I haven't been so aware of the shoes you're walking in and praying for want of a better word that my kids never have to walk in them. That I was lucky enough never to walk in them, and what a fragile place it is, and what a fragile place it is between you and I, because of this.

Q: Do you think that is part of it?

A: Okay the other thing I'd like to say here is that my empathy is with Kris [the candidate's mother]. Ever since you brought her into my life she has been a real person to me. I think, what would she want for you, and how would she want you to be doing this, and what would she want you to write? She's been the third person in the room every time I meet you. She really has. I would say that definitely she's an entity in our relationship and I hope she approves of how I've handled you and your work.

Q: So, then, what do you regard as the most important qualities of the supervisor of trauma narrative?

A: Empathy, trust, patience and imagination. I do think you have to see the student or the candidate, that their emotional and psychic health is more important than anything else. I think trust is huge. You've got to be able to trust your supervisor. Because I believe in stepping over that personal line, you've got to be able to trust your supervisor— that what you say and what you tell them is confidential and that they understand, that they're not sort of rolling their eyes and thinking, oh god. And authenticity, you have to be authentic.

Q: So how do you supervise your doctoral writing students who aren't writing about personally traumatic experiences differently to those who are?

A: I don't have to ask them about therapists or supportive partners or parents or friends or meds or psychiatrists. I don't have to know anything about their psychic health I suppose or their emotional health unless it comes up in some other way and they want to share that with me and if they do, if it's got no impact on their writing...

Q: Are you more draconian?

A: Am I tougher? No I'm not actually. I still believe it's just different. How can I explain it? I still believe in the independent researcher. That the candidate is the independent researcher and that they overtake me in terms of expertise and knowledge at some wonderful time during the execution of the dissertation. Am I more draconian? No. I'm empathetic about any life really.

Q: Do you think you got that philosophy from having to supervise students over the years on trauma? I know a lot of people with supervisors and hear a lot about it and your strategies are notably different.

A: One thing I will share with you is that when I did my doctorate, despite having supervisors who I enjoyed and liked, I felt very isolated and I never want anybody under my auspices to feel isolated, fearful, like a failure, like it's all hopeless, or like they don't know what they're doing. I

just never want anyone to feel like that and that's a philosophy beyond trauma narrative. So I guess it's come from that really.

Q: Do you sympathise to any extent with more traditional academics, who see the higher degree and writing about personal subjects, particularly traumatic ones, as incompatible?

A: No. I believe a university is a place of learning. It's a place of thinking. It's a place of new knowledge. There are a couple of theoristsⁱⁱ who say this is the age of trauma. Many social taboos have been broken down. Many damaged people are needing to speak, needing to be heard. There's a lot of voicelessness which is being remedied through life writing, through a non-traditional dissertation. A lot of this memoir work has come out of universities around the world through non-traditional dissertations. I see it as a good thing. I see it as a vehicle for finishing off these taboos, and a lot of life writing around trauma particularly is universal. I mean, everyone experiences death at some point. You experienced it very early. Let's hope everyone doesn't experience all the other traumas that I've been supervising. So I think it's very ungenerous to be so prescriptive about what you can and can't do in a university...I think if the academics who are supervising this sort of narrative are rigorous enough, it's not watering down any sort of doctoral standard of excellence. To answer these academics, I would suggest reading some of the work that we're producing that underpins the life writing of non-traditional PhDs or non-traditional doctorates. I don't understand the argument and I don't understand the lack of generosity.

Q: It must take more energy out of you as a supervisor taking on students like me who require academic direction but also a delicate and empathetic approach, particularly when you are juggling more than one student at a time. What are your strategies for maintaining a necessary distance and detaching from trauma generally?

A: I am lucky enough to have a very close dear friend who's a psychologist and we get together regularly. So I have my own sort of inbuilt therapist. I need it. I do need it.

Q: Would that be a suggestion from you to other supervisors?

A: Look there is vicarious trauma in this sort of supervision. I must admit, since I've set up the model and started practicing on you onwards, I haven't been in need of help. Before that I didn't know what to do really. I was pretty upset a lot of the time with the first student with whom I had a difficult experience, but I would suggest anybody who is writing trauma narrative of their own or who is supervising trauma narrative has their own therapeutic scaffold. It means if something's bothering you, you've got someone you can go and knock on their door. It can be your best friend. It doesn't have to be a therapist, although with deep vicarious trauma I would recommend a therapist.

Results

Still in raw data stage, the results of the full interviews are yet to be fully analysed but interestingly, we learnt as much about the other's attitudes from the questions we posed, as the answers we gave. We both found it a worthwhile exercise and one worthy of undertaking, and we would recommend it to any supervisor/candidate relationship after several years of working together. Halse and Bansel write:

The challenge with implementing any new paradigm of doctoral supervision is that it calls into question existing structures and practices already deeply embedded in the organisation, operation and psyche of disciplines, students, supervisors, and university administrators and staff. The challenge of shifting these entrenched values and practices should not be underestimated, particularly when individuals and institutions have an interest in their preservation. (Halse and Bansel, 2013: 389)

We are not suggesting rewriting any pedagogy around creative practice supervision as such. But what we are suggesting is an enhancement or addition to the understandings: that the supervision of candidates undertaking trauma narrative is not the same as supervising candidates outside trauma narrative. As Kroll writes: 'In this quality assurance environment, what stands out is the primacy of a productive student-supervisor relationship' (Kroll 2013: 4).

Barbara Kamler and Pat Thomson, in their 2014 book on doctoral writing pedagogies, reiterate

the importance of the supervisor to candidate dynamic:

The one-to-one meetings between doctoral candidates and their supervisors are not simply conversations in the office. They are THE key way in which the doctorate is achieved. A doctoral award is always a collaborative endeavour, but one which is a private and somewhat mysterious process occurring behind closed doors (Kamler & Thomson 2014: x).

This statement on the importance of supervision is never more important to the development of the doctoral work when the student is writing from personal trauma. The above interviews reveal part of a supervisory relationship, opening the door if you like, to illuminate a process that has little framework underpinning it.

Importantly, Kamler and Thomson also argue

... that it is imperative for supervision pedagogies to be designed, rather than remain... 'accidental'. That is, unintended, inexplicit, taken for granted...However, the lack of institutional and disciplinary attention to the pedagogical features of supervision leaves supervisors with relatively few educational resources to call on, other than their own experience of being supervised (Kamler & Thomson 2014,: xi-xii).

Again, this paper hopes to provide some of this much needed focus on supervision, and form part of a resource kit for supervisors and doctoral candidates in life writing of trauma.

Conclusion

Conducting this follow up pedagogical research of a continuing supervision/candidate relationship of more four to five years has allowed supervisor and candidate to interrogate their working relationship, from both professional and personal perspectives. This has been particularly beneficial towards the end of a doctoral candidature, having spent four years writing trauma narrative in the academic context, where both supervisor and candidate have had to navigate the complex and ethically grey area that is writing about personal and traumatic experience. We propose that the supervision of higher degrees that discuss real traumatic

experience from the personal perspective of the candidate require a different model of supervision than other subjects. Kroll and Finlayson write: ‘Supervisor, however, can be a job description only, rather than a position charged with ethical and moral responsibilities, although those might be implied’ (Kroll and Finlayson 2012: 2). Our position is that supervision of candidates undertaking trauma narrative cannot be *without* ‘ethical and moral responsibilities’ (ibid). This takes into account the emotional wellbeing of the candidate as well as the supervisor. It is our hope that the publication of our edited interviews will assist other supervisors and candidates at all stages of their working relationships negotiate the relatively uncharted territory of completing thesis work involving the writing of trauma. Above all, we argue that trust, empathy, authenticity and personal interaction between the supervisor and candidate who are working on trauma narrative can complement, rather than detract from, the production of academically rigorous research and life writing.

Interviews:

Sue Joseph interviewing Freya Latona, July 4, 2014, London

Freya Latona interviewing Sue Joseph, July 4, 2014, London

Brief Timeline of Supervisory Relationship

October 2009: First meeting to discuss Honours thesis

March 2010-November 2010: Honours thesis development and completion

January 2011: Honours thesis awarded a First Class result

June 2011: Candidate wins Guy Morrison Prize for Literary Journalism for creative work in Honours thesis

July 2011-November 2011: Discussions between supervisor and candidate developing Honours thesis into a PhD

January 2012-present: Candidate and supervisor in frequent contact working on PhD

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Endnotes:

ⁱ Conducted on July 4, 2014, in London

ⁱⁱ Miller & Tougaw, 2002: 1-2