

**Mentoring, women and the construction
of academic identities**

Anita Devos

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

**Faculty of Education
University of Technology, Sydney**

July 2005

Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

.....

Acknowledgements

The idea for this thesis grew out of my work with my friend and colleague, Jan McLean, at the University of New South Wales, Sydney,

Thanks to the women who agreed to be interviewed for this research and shared their time and experiences with me.

Thank you to my supervisors Alastair Pennycook and Nicky Solomon in the Faculty of Education at the University of Technology Sydney, for their intellectual guidance and support. Over the last few years I have been based at the Faculty for a part of each week where I have enjoyed the positive physical and intellectual environment.

Thank you to my fellow postgraduates in the Postgraduate Student Room 5.580 – including Usa Noytim, Ross Foreman, Constance Ellwood, Emi Otsuji, Hamad al Alawi, Kelvin Tan and Sumiko Tanaguchi – for their company and encouragement. Recently I have benefited too from my work with Alison Lee and the thesis writing group at UTS, including Usa Noytim, Sumiko Tanaguchi, Stephen Relf, Cathy McMullen, Terry Fitzgerald and Gun Berglund. Thanks too to Carolyn Williams, Hermine Scheeres and Carl Rhodes who have each given me useful advice along the way.

To my friends from the 'Foucault Reading Group' – Jane Durie, Ann Reich, Barbie Bloch, Constance Ellwood and Jayne Bye – thank you for the opportunity to discuss Foucault, amongst other things, in such good company. A special thanks to my friend Kate MacNeill for her support, particularly in these final months.

Thank you to the New South Wales Institute for Educational Research Incorporated for a small grant towards my research costs; to the Library staff at the University of New South Wales for their help in tracking down materials; and to Renata Atkin for her help with formatting the thesis.

Lastly, thank you to my partner David Simpson for his support during my doctoral studies. This thesis is dedicated to our daughters, Claudia and Freya Devos.

Abstract

In this thesis I investigate the influence of mentoring on the formation of the identities of women academics in Australian universities. Many Australian and New Zealand universities have introduced some form of mentoring initiative for women academics over the last decade. The aim of these initiatives is usually expressed in terms of supporting women's career development in order to increase the representation of women in senior positions in universities.

I take up Foucault's theory of governmentality together with feminist theories of subjectivity, to examine the ways in which mentoring contributes to 'producing' the women as academic subjects of the times. My analysis of the formation of the subjectivities of the women concerned is set in the context of a political economy of contemporary higher education accompanied by the changing nature of academic work. I argue that mentoring has found support in recent years because it responds to the concerns of 'the enterprise university' with improving performance while also being seen to respond to the problem of gender inequality.

The thesis is based on interviews conducted with 17 women academics who have participated in a formal mentoring program or who have been mentored informally by a colleague in their universities, six of which are discussed in detail. I use a feminist interpretive framework to analyse the discourses through which the women and I construct their accounts at interview. I also highlight the parallels between the confessional aspects of feminist research interviewing and the confessional space of the mentoring relationship itself, particularly mentoring of women *by* women.

On the basis of this analysis, I argue that mentoring has a number of productive effects, producing particular sorts of self-regulating subjects, together with new knowledges and discourses of work and of the self. In their engagement in mentoring, the women take up a project of self-review and self-regulation. This can be understood as a biographical project of the self. It is a project that is iterative and ongoing, as the women navigate the discourses of academic work, career,

gender, mothering, sexuality, social class and ethnicity, amongst others. This process is frequently fragmented and contested as the women confront the contradictions within the combined positioning of themselves and their positioning by others. Rather than try to resolve the tensions and contradictions that characterise this process, these tensions might be better explored in terms of their productive potential for disrupting the gendered work order of universities.

Table of Contents

Certificate of Authorship/Originality	II
Acknowledgements	III
Abstract.....	IV
Table of Contents.....	VI
Notes on Notations	IX
Chapter One: Investigating women academics and mentoring in Australian universities	1
My interest in women academics and mentoring.....	1
The focus of this study.....	7
Developing the theoretical tools for the job.....	9
The structure of the thesis	12
Chapter Two: The emergence of mentoring for women academics in Australian universities	16
A short history of mentoring.....	16
Gender equity and enterprise: the confluence of discourses	23
Mentoring in higher education	26
The changing context: 'The knowledge economy'	30
The changing context: 'The Enterprise University'	31
Academic work in the enterprise university.....	37
Gender and academic work in the enterprise university	43
Chapter Three: Feminist research: On knowing, befriending, confessing	52
Part 1: My approach to the research	52

The women in this study	52
Where I'm coming from: on doing feminist research.....	56
Acts of interpretation.....	61
Reading discourse	67
Part 2: Discipline and power in research relationships	70
Setting up the research: Power/knowledge in research design	70
'Asking the right questions': Power and the 'knowing subject' of research	75
Must we be friends? Problematizing friendship in feminist research.....	80
Calling (up) all women academics! The interview as confessional space	83
Chapter Four: Managing the self	88
Assembling subjects through technologies of governing	90
Karen: "I'm running out of excuses"	97
Deirdre: "My career ladder thing"	103
Chapter Five: Feminism, governmentality and the active subject	117
Being a Foucauldian and a feminist.....	118
Michelle: "I do all the things that you're supposed to do as an academic"	123
Marian: "it's women who are actually doing something for women"	130
Chapter Six: Assembling the woman academic in discourse.....	142
My approach to analysing discourse	142
Meaning making through a careers discourse	145
Subjectivity, space and desire: four women talk	148
Michelle: "a little office of my own"	148
Karen: "the way I'd like to be living my life"	160
Barb: "... all that stuff people want. I want to be loved!"	167

Angela: “claiming a bit more space”	182
Chapter Seven: Subjectivity, power and, desire: fashioning the woman academic through mentoring.....	194
Positioning the thesis in a feminist discourse	198
I comply therefore I can’t resist: Setting aside unhelpful binaries	200
Gender, enterprise and the emergence of mentoring in Australia universities	202
Assembling women academics in and out of mentoring	206
Theorising self-regulation within a feminist project	209
Never a dull moment: The role of mentoring in the discursive production of subjectivity	211
Desire, ambition and identity work: managing oneself within a careers discourse	212
The productive effects of mentoring	214
What is it possible for women to be (-come)?	216
Bibliography	219

Notes on Notations

I have changed the names of participants and some identifying details in line with my commitment to ensure confidentiality.

I have indented quotations from publications in the text in the same size font as the main text.

Quotations from interview transcripts are indented in the text in *italics*.

I have also used *italics* from time to time to emphasise a point.