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Sarah Li and Clive Seale

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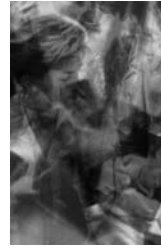
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Acquiring a Sociological Identity: An Observational Study of a PhD Project

■ **Sarah Li**

Kingston University and St. George's, University of London

■ **Clive Seale**

Brunel University

ABSTRACT

The acquisition of a sociological identity during the process of PhD supervision is reported, drawing on detailed analysis of selected observations of the supervision sessions, written communications and other aspects of interaction over the period of a single case study supervision which involved the authors as participants. The transition from an 'applied' identity (in nursing) to a 'pure' or 'professional' identity in sociology is documented, identifying the precise interactional mechanisms for encouraging and achieving this transition. These include 'bracketing' out of common-sense interpretations of behaviour that draw on the old identity and 'distancing' from the normative judgements of professionals inhabiting a dispreferred, non-sociological position. Taking place in a context of enthusiastic, directive and insistent exhortation and presenting a particular and somewhat locally determined version of adequate sociological work, the study shows both supervisor and student collaborating in the social construction of a sociologist.

KEY WORDS

collaboration / PhD supervision / professional socialization / sociological identity / teaching sociology

In writing up [the nurses'] ideas you need to look as if you're not personally involved in promoting them ... that is essential if it's going to be a sociology thesis rather than nursing research thesis. (Year 1 supervision; supervisor's comment)

[I feel that I] now have much more insight into how to write as a sociologist. (Year 3, e-mail message from student)

Had quite a tutorial with CS! Debated about sociology of the body. He did not see the point of putting the body in my analysis but I did! (Year 4 student diary entry)

Gosh it's wonderful, wonderful how [the thesis has] turned out. (Year 5 supervision, supervisor's comment)

Introduction

This article describes the acquisition of a social identity as a sociologist during a part-time PhD project (1997–2002) in which we participated as supervisor (CS) and student (SL). We present our experience as a case study of professional socialization, focusing on the transformation or 'metamorphosis' (Huber, 1990) SL experienced in moving from one professional identity (nursing) to another (sociology). The doctoral experience thus involved SL 'writing' herself into a particular authorial identity as part of a broader experience of enculturation into a new discipline, a process of ritual cleansing that has some parallels with the entry experiences undergone by those entering total institutions (Goffman, 1968). This involved the acquisition of a different perspective on nursing and eventually the attainment of formal markers of disciplinary membership (Becher, 1987; Huber, 1990). Thus, the thesis passed in examination (Li, 2002) and has led to a number of publications in social science journals (Li, 2004, 2005).

The PhD study was a qualitative investigation of palliative nursing care, in which the psychosocial care provided by nurses was reconceptualized as 'symbiotic niceness', whereby nurses and patients collaborated in performances of politeness and mutual support that resulted in 'good' psychosocial care. Moving from a nursing perspective on care (SL was trained as a nurse and is a lecturer) to a sociological perspective constituted the key 'task' of the supervisory experience, and we describe here how this was negotiated and achieved in our interactions. We have described elsewhere other aspects of the supervisory process, including the acquisition of skills in data analysis (Li and Seale, 2007a) and the management of criticism (Li and Seale, 2007b). The overall aim of our project is to demonstrate the value of an observational study to understand doctoral supervision, a method rarely if ever used for this purpose. The present article demonstrates at the micro-interactional level the tension that can be experienced between a 'pure' or 'professional' sociology, and an 'applied' or 'policy' approach (Becher, 1987; Burawoy, 2005).

Disciplinary Identity and Types of Sociology

Becher (1987) proposes a distinction between 'pure' types of disciplinary knowledge, in which he places disciplines like sociology, history and anthropology, and

'applied', in which he places disciplines mainly devoted to particular practical purposes, such as education, nursing or law. Pure knowledge, for Becher, is concerned with 'particulars, qualities, complications; resulting in understanding/interpretation' (1987: 278). Applied disciplines in the social sciences, on the other hand, are 'utilitarian ... concerned with enhancement of ... professional practice; resulting in protocols/procedures' (1987: 278).

This distinction is similar to that followed by Silverman (2004: 64–5) in his distinction between 'partisan' and 'scholar' positions *within* sociology. The partisan sociologist is involved in a politicized search for cures to social problems, involving a championing of underdog causes. This 'applied' view of the discipline tends to reduce, in Silverman's view, the status of sociology as a pure discipline and damage its capacity for providing fresh perspectives on value positions. Silverman's advocacy of the pure position is accompanied by advice on how this perspective can, in spite of expectations to the contrary, sometimes deliver solutions to practical problems, often doing so by questioning the assumptions involved in constituting phenomena as 'social problems'. Within applied fields there is sometimes appreciation of this potential contribution from sociology. Rafferty (1995), for example, argues that an adequate understanding of nursing practice should question nurses' 'claims to professionalism' (1995: 146).

Burawoy (2005) has recently sparked considerable debate about the relationship of sociology to practical and political projects, distinguishing four kinds of sociology: professional, policy, critical and public. His account of a policy approach that accepts the definitions and values of policy makers is close to Becher's applied approach. His professional ideal type is close to that of Silverman's scholar (although Silverman's scholar is imagined to be at least publicly relevant, if not committed to an exclusively public sociology). But otherwise, it is not clear that Burawoy's scheme can be simply mapped onto the dichotomies proposed by Becher and Silverman. Public sociology, for example, represents an ideal of a sociology informed by (professionally generated) theory that offers a critical analysis of policy perspectives, thus being a synthesized solution to the limitations of the other three ideal types that Burawoy delineates and, perhaps, to the limitations of the partisan approach that Silverman decries.

Whether pure, applied, partisan, public or professional, it is generally accepted that institutional ideologies influence the production and reproduction of different styles of disciplinary knowledge (Becher, 1987, 1989; Huber, 1990; Larsson and Wisselgren, 2006; Prior, 1994; Tierney, 1991; Ylijoki, 2000). Delamont et al. argue that the PhD is a key mechanism for the academic socialization of particular disciplinary identities and 'disciplinary loyalties' (2000: 181) so that 'graduate student socialization is one powerful mechanism whereby the cultures of the academy are transmitted from generation to generation' (2000: 179). However, these authors also observe that this socialization is not just about what knowledge is produced and transmitted but one that is embedded in the practical activities of students and supervisors, observation of which has been rarely reported in research studies on the PhD process. In fact,

most research studies on doctoral supervision are based on second-hand accounts derived from interviews. As Delamont et al. observe:

... there is ... a continuing lack of observational data on actual conduct of the most private supervisory relationships. The data that are available, and that have been reported in recent years, consist almost exclusively of accounts, collected under the auspices of qualitative interview studies. (2000: 134)

An exception is the work of Prior (1994) who, following in the tradition of the sociology of science (Knorr-Cetina, 1981; Latour and Woolgar, 1986), describes some of the discursive practices involved in a graduate student sociology seminar. Prior notes that successful participation involves getting to know the particular cultural codes of the relevant academic community. Thus a student must 'learn the rules for appropriate speaking. She must master the ways of thinking and writing considered appropriate in that setting and by their teacher' (1994: 485). This will then enable a successful student to 'extract the distinct figure of a discipline from the messy ground of everyday life' (1994: 521). Through demonstrating this in a case study of redrafting a dissertation proposal, she shows how the resultant text reifies an idealized picture of the research process where local contingencies are removed to make the knowledge claims appear stronger and to enhance the appearance of disciplinarity.

Each discipline, then, has a distinct institutional culture in terms of how knowledge is produced, how people construct their world view, and how newcomers are socialized into that particular world (Becher, 1989; Tierney, 1991). Additionally, Becher (1994) points out that the local context in which disciplinary identities are formed may vary: 'disciplinary culture ... [is] shaped by the characteristic of a particular department, not only by the discipline itself' (1994: 357). We would add that biographical factors also play a part in influencing the manner in which disciplinary cultures are experienced. It is therefore relevant to provide some local contextual detail about the participants and the setting.

Participants and Setting

SL came from the predominantly applied discipline of nursing, with a history of prioritizing knowledge that furthered the nursing profession's values. She was brought up in largely hierarchical and patriarchal societies (China and Hong Kong), in which females were typically socialized into the subordinate servant role, and, in the context of education, students were expected to respect their teachers as their seniors who knew best. Contrary to the analytic and problem-solving approach to learning aspired to in educational practice in the British universities, the teaching and learning styles experienced by SL were very different: students were more or less passive learners. The self-directing and critical learning style preferred in British universities was something that she had to learn over time. After an early childhood in which she experienced considerable adversity in Communist China, SL came to England in 1967 to be trained as a nurse, completing all her

undergraduate and postgraduate education in English universities. Her first degree was in social science and she obtained her MA degree in sociology in the same department in which she studied for her doctorate.

CS worked in a university department of sociology that had a particularly strong history of seeking to distinguish itself from pragmatic and utilitarian social policy perspectives. Since 1979 he had worked in applied social research environments before joining the department as a lecturer in 1993 and was particularly concerned to justify his own work, and the work of his doctoral students, to an audience of sociologists whom he feared to be dismissive of policy-related work, valuing instead a 'pure' or theoretically oriented model of sociology. His perception of SL at the outset was that she would require a great deal of assistance if she was to attain a standard likely to pass a PhD. She was eventually to surprise him with her capacity to 'bounce back' and learn from criticism, albeit tactfully expressed (Li and Seale, 2007b).

We demonstrate later how these biographies and local context intersected to produce a somewhat hierarchical and didactic teacher–student relationship, reflected in a number of the examples we present in this article. First, we explain the methods we have used to produce our account, which focuses on the process through which SL's 'applied' identity in nursing is shifted to a 'pure' identity as a sociologist.

Methods

This is a report from a longitudinal case study (Yin, 1994) documenting a student's PhD journey in a UK university department of sociology from 1997 to 2002. The participants were the authors of this article: SL (PhD student) and CS (PhD supervisor). The idea for the project occurred after the PhD was completed, when we reflected on the potential usefulness of an archive of materials relating to the supervision which SL would otherwise have thrown away. Conversations with other doctoral students reinforced this view.

We used multiple sources of evidence, tracing the transformation of disciplinary identity by identifying critical moments. For this purpose we have analysed 40 drafts of written work, which include written comments from the supervisor, and 17 transcriptions of audio-taped supervisory sessions recorded at different stages of the PhD experience. Supervisions usually lasted between one and two hours, frequently involving a discussion of written work or issues arising in fieldwork. Additional materials analysed in the course of this project, some of which are referred to in the present article, include 17 written records of the main contents of supervisory sessions made by the supervisor and agreed by the student (supervision reports), five annual progress reports written by both parties, and 18 e-mails containing requests or responses to clarify issues arising from SL's written work or field work. Finally, a contemporaneous research diary was kept by the student, documenting her perception and interpretation of events. We were restricted to these materials because of the opportunistic nature

of the study. We did not, for example, tape-record the viva and nor did CS happen to keep a diary. We recognize that such extra sources might have provided a fuller account of the experience, but note that the range of materials that we have analysed is nevertheless unprecedented in the literature reporting studies of the doctoral experience.

All text was entered into the NVIVO qualitative data management software program and read separately by SL and CS to formulate an agreed account of key themes. One theme was that of 'identity', so segments of text relating to this were marked with codes and retrieved in an NVIVO search for further inspection and analysis. Most of the examples in the present article result from retrievals relating to this theme.

Our analysis draws on several approaches, principles and procedures, described in Seale (1999, 2004). We have drawn on our knowledge of qualitative thematic analysis, conversation analysis and general analysis of interaction involving counting. The combination of methods is designed to deliver a fuller and more rounded account than one method alone. Our thematic analysis reflected an underlying 'constant comparative' method whereby like materials are placed with like and new categories created for cases that deviate significantly from existing categories. This involves an active consideration of negative instances or deviant cases so that the emergent categories account for maximum variety in the original material under analysis. Sometimes counts of instances support qualitative examples to indicate the prevalence of particular phenomena.

It is possible that some readers will find fault with a study which combines methods in this way, on the grounds that the methods derive from different theoretical stances or philosophical positions. It is possible to claim that counting things involves a commitment to regarding language as a container for transmitting content, whereas conversation analysis involves the presumption that people use language as a way of creating social order. We disagree with the view that particular methods are inevitably linked to theoretical or epistemological positions and refer readers to Seale (1999, Chapter 9) and Hammersley (1992) for relevant discussions. We note, too, that counting in conversation analysis is now seen by some leading practitioners as desirable (Heritage, 1999).

Our use of conversation analysis has been relevant in examination of selected segments of talk that we transcribed in particular detail. Transcripts use dots between words to indicate passages that are deleted (...). We underline words where we now want to emphasize certain passages. In transcripts of talk a number within parentheses, for example (0.2), indicates the length in seconds of a pause and empty parentheses () indicate inaudible speech. Two right-sided square brackets (]) on top of each other indicate an overlap of speech between two speakers. Where data extracts refer to people and places readily identifiable through their connections to the authors, details have been changed to preserve anonymity. The original study of palliative care done by SL was subject to relevant ethical approval.

The Construction of a Disciplinary Identity

CS sometimes exhorted SL to achieve a sociological perspective, as is shown in extract 1.

Extract 1

you've got to retain a sense of why you're doing this ... it's got to be sociological research. (Written comments, year 1)

CS's choice of 'you've got to' and 'it's got to be' is markedly insistent, but offers little in the way of guidance in how 'sociological research' is to be achieved. Other comments, though, presented SL with two linked techniques for self-transformation in her search for a new disciplinary identity: 'bracketing' (27 instances across all the data set) and 'distancing' (15 instances). Bracketing involved making explicit and then suspending the hitherto implicit rules of interpretation normally deployed by SL for understanding the behaviour of nurses, so that this nurse behaviour could be treated as anthropologically strange. Another way of putting this is to say that SL was encouraged to topicalize the nurses' accounts as occasions for rhetorical display, rather than treat their accounts as a resource giving an unproblematic window into the nursing world. 'Distancing' involved a deliberate attempt to think against the normative positions promoted in nurses' professional ideologies in order to retain a focus on sociology.

We first present examples of bracketing and distancing, and then move into detailed analysis of an extended extract of talk from a key supervision in which the tensions between an 'applied' nursing and 'pure' sociological perspective became particularly explicit.

Bracketing

A classic 'bracketing' moment is shown in Extract 2:

Extract 2

This is what nurses present to you, not what they 'are' like. You need to bracket out the issue of whether they are or are not like this, and concentrate on analysing how they achieve this impression, through their accounts of how they manage 'difficult' patients. (Written comments, year 2)

CS, with an insistent 'you need to', tries to persuade SL to suspend her judgement (which had been that nurses had to try to be 'nice' with 'difficult' patients) by bracketing out the issue of authenticity in favour of a view of nurses' accounts as performative.

Later work by SL demonstrates her adaptation to the approved perspective. SL has presented field notes where a nurse criticizes a doctor for treating her favoured patient insensitively and comments (Extract 3):

Extract 3

[This shows] that the doing of criticism ... is skilful ... doubts about the moral adequacy of the doctor are revealed and displayed. The patient's right to speak his mind ... is preserved, and the nurse [presents herself] as a competent, rational and morally responsible professional whose 'expert' knowledge is also displayed ... Telling of such 'atrocities stories' thus allows palliative care nurses ... to say what it is to be a good palliative care nurse, and what it is to be properly professional. (Written draft, year 5)

SL's commentary, unlike extract 2, now focuses on the nurse's presentation of her own professional identity, showing that this is done by the telling of a disparaging story about another less adequately professional person (an 'atrocities story'). SL's display of the perspective preferred by CS draws the following somewhat laconic praise from him in a written comment in the margin: 'Very nice section'.

Distancing

Extracts 4 and 5 show CS offering advice to SL of this sort:

Extract 4

My main feeling is that you need to distance yourself more from the nursing/professional agenda and take on a more sceptical, sociological approach. (Written comments, year 1)

Extract 5

You present the ideas of (author 1) in glowing terms, having appeared to have 'bought' her line ... I feel you need to maintain considerably more distance between yourself and the agendas of the writers you review. Otherwise the thesis looks like a piece of hospice propaganda. (Written comments, year 1)

These comments were in response to a draft literature review in which SL attempted to characterize the position of the hospice movement on psychosocial care.

At this point, SL found it difficult to write in terms that did not suggest implicit support for the normative position of the people she was studying. Relatively new to the field of terminal care, her entry into the palliative and hospice care scene was accompanied by deep admiration for the work done by nurses in that specialism, coupled with gratitude for their accommodating approach to her request to do fieldwork in their places of work. Seeking understanding of the palliative nursing perspective, she was perhaps inevitably drawn into a position of considerable sympathy for their task in solving difficult problems of suffering and found it easy to identify with their professional project.

In the next section, we present an in-depth analysis of one verbal interaction during a PhD supervision which occurred in year 2. We choose this particular data extract because the typical features of sociology and nursing are reflected in the supervision dialogue, the tension between sociology and

nursing can be located and the sequential accomplishment of a sociological identity can be identified as the talk unfolds.

A Supervision Dialogue

The data analysed in this section are taken from a two-hour-long supervision session occurring at the beginning of SL's second year of PhD work. SL had been attempting to link her observational data to some of the reading which she had done on psychosocial aspects of palliative care. The interaction contains moments at which a social problem is gradually talked into a sociological problem (Silverman, 2004). It will help at this stage to be reminded of the main arguments of the eventual PhD thesis.

In her thesis (Li, 2002), SL observes that palliative care nursing literature presents 'psychosocial care' as a special area of work for nurses, who are seen as possessing professional expertise in addressing the psychological and social troubles of patients, their self-esteem and relationship issues and their emotional problems as well as the physical difficulties with which traditional (pre-professional) nursing has been preoccupied. SL shows how this professional perspective on care, expressed for example in nursing policy documents and student nurse textbooks, tends to demarcate psychosocial care as a recently discovered and separate area of nursing skill. SL's position, on the other hand, depicts 'psychosocial' activity as a normal, inevitable and routine part of adequately accomplished nursing care. Her thesis further argues that psychosocial care involves the enactment of 'symbiotic niceness', collaboratively accomplished by both nurses and patients.

In this part of our analysis we break down a lengthy sequence into manageable fragments, beginning with a sequence (Extract 6a) that illustrates the often emotionally charged content of the fieldwork experiences that SL brought to supervisions. Just before the first turn, SL has been telling CS a story about being present when a male patient who believed he had had a stroke was told that he had a terminal brain tumour. When the hospital consultant broke the bad news to him, he and his family members broke down completely. The shock of this news has sent his son dashing off the ward crying. This story is being attended to closely by CS as the extract starts and SL continues to tell her story in lines 2–6, indicating that the patient had then expressed concern for her, SL.

Extract 6a

1 CS: hmh hmh

2 SL: and he said I wasn't too worried about me dying it was you it
3 was you that I was worried about and then I started crying and
4 the nurse's eyes started to swell as well and then he put his hand
5 on my shoulder and said oh don't worry don't worry don't worry
6 I'm ok you know what I mean and it (0.2)

7 CS: well you've seen some very gripping and moving things

8 what what do you conclude about that (0.3) as far as your thesis
9 is concerned?

CS's 'well' at line 7 is ambiguously placed. It can be heard as a contrast marker functioning as an emotional management strategy for CS to contain the emotional dimension that could potentially destabilize the interaction. CS remembers the emotional force of this moment and SL remembers that she was very upset about the field work incident that they were discussing. An entry in her research diary attests to this:

I was emotionally knackered. That poor poor man. I can't stop crying. I thought of my dad who had just died. My heart is heavy, heavy, heavy. I told CS about this and he was most concerned. He has a humanly caring side to his very academic status after all. (Research Diary Year 1, 1997)

CS's concern for SL is visible in his response at lines 7–9, as his 'well' introduces the possibility of a topic-change. Before that change, however, he acknowledges the emotional force of what SL has said in his 'you've seen some very gripping and moving things'. He then attempts to re-channel SL to think about how her observations could be made relevant to her research question, concerning how palliative care nurses enact psychosocial care in their daily practices. Extract 6b shows that what happened next produced a spark of insight from SL that was to form a key argument of the eventual thesis:

Extract 6b

10 SL: (0.6) hh I think psychosocial care happens (0.3) all the
 11 time (0.3) you know at the con point of contact at the point of
 12 contact with patients that the patient involved (0.2) it
 13 themselves (0.3) you know (0.2)
 14 CS: hmn this is interesting
 15 SL: and I also think that (0.2) eh psychosocial care sometimes is
 16 incorporated in the time that they give physical care (0.5)
 17 CS: yes (0.3) right
 18 SL: well I think I am making too early an assump[tion]
 19 CS: [no no it's
 20 alright I think it's very convincing what you are saying you can
 21 definitely support it eventually
 21 SL: yeah yeah

SL's uncertain response ('I think') and pauses at lines 10–13 are indicative of her difficulty in initially meeting CS's challenge to relate the observations to her thesis. Yet it is here that she first expresses an idea ('psychosocial care happens all the time') that was subsequently taken up enthusiastically by CS and was eventually to become a key claim of the thesis. This emergent idea is at this stage accompanied by further markers of uncertainty (line 18: 'I think I am making too early an assumption') but CS responds quickly to the contrary, marked by the overlaps at line 19 ('no no'), to indicate his support for this idea, building on his earlier praise for it at line 14 ('this is interesting'). SL's receipt of this reassurance and support is marked by her 'yeah yeah' at line 21.

The dialogue continues for a number of turns (not shown) in which CS encourages SL to consider how her insights might produce a sociological account of psychosocial care. In an attempt to find sociological relevance SL at one point proposes that the promotion of psychosocial care might be regarded as an extension of medicalization, a suggestion which CS indicates to be theoretically unchallenging because it simply positions SL as confirming a pre-existing theory. Here CS appears to be encouraging a more critical stance towards existing literature than SL initially feels able to take. He suggests instead that 'you could try and think of a thesis which tries to challenge a set of theories'. This then prompts an exchange about existing medical sociology, in which the work of three other authors is discussed. We pick up the interaction at line 148 in extract 6c.

Extract 6c

- 148 CS: all these people have 'called' themselves sociologists
 149 I think that's a good line to take
 150 SL: alright yeah yeah
 151 CS: you know you can say well look (0.2) now are these sort
 152 of quasi- sociologists
 153 SL: uhm (laughs)
 154 CS: they're only half sociologists
 155 SL: (laughing) I know nothing at all (laughed)
 156 CS: oh no you're a true sociologist, you are pure (G) sociologist
 158 SL: yes (laughs)

It is at this moment that the antagonistic distinction between pure/professional and policy/applied sociology is visible (Becher, 1987; Burawoy, 2005). It is also at this moment that the local character of CS's advice is most evident, reflecting his institutional identity as a member of a department where the demarcation between a theoretically driven sociological perspective and a social policy or social problems perspective was particularly strong. His exhortations to SL continue for a period of further interaction (not shown here) in which his strong sense of urgency that SL think of herself as 'challenging some of these areas' is conveyed by further markers of obligation ('you really have to', 'it has to be', 'you've got to be', 'you have to really', 'you're going to have to' and 'it's going to require you to'). SL responds to this with numerous markers of attention and agreement ('yeah yeah that's right', 'yeah yeah') that suggest willingness to be aligned with this perspective, suggesting acquiescence to the particularly directive style adopted by CS at this point. The exhortatory sequence continues with further explicit encouragements to take a critical view of both nursing perspectives and those of the 'quasi-sociologists' identified earlier:

Extract 6d

- 195 CS: you've got to (0.2) think of yourself as challenging some
 196 of these areas that's a possible challenge that you can manage
 197 SL: yeah yeah
 198 CS: it's going to require you to look very closely at the people who made
 199 that claim
 ...

- 208 CS: what I want to try to do in my conversation
 209 with you now is to...generate the sense
 210 that everything you do [...
 211 SL: [is [different
 212 CS: [needs potentially to
 213 (0.2) relate to some sociological concern
 214 (0.2) which could be about challenging these medical
 215 sociologists' views
 ...
 220 CS: you've got to retain a sense of why
 222 you're doing this and it's got to be the reason why it's got to be
 223 sociological research
 224 SL: yes yes
 225 CS: otherwise (0.3) your field work will generate mountains
 226 of stuff you won't be able to sense why (0.2)
 227 SL: yeah thos those are the two areas that I really want to eh
 228 look at

By the end of this extract SL is responding to the barrage of enthusiastically delivered obligatory statements and exhortation from CS by producing more extended markers of alignment and agreement with his preferred perspective. Her repeated affirmations ('yeah yeah' and 'yes yes' at lines 197 and 224), her attempt to complete CS's utterance in an affirmative manner (line 211) and her statement that 'those are the...areas that I really want to look at' (lines 227–8) are all evidence for this. The interchange, then, can now be seen to have a crescendo-like structure, ending with the exchange shown in 6e.

Extract 6e

- 289 SL: yeah yeah I don't think I have ever looked at this
 290 concept in the way that I want to look at it at the
 291 moment (0.3) you know (0.3)
 292 CS: it's good that you are feeling that way

SL's extended turn is now a more fulsome marker of alignment with CS's preferred 'sociological' perspective and is followed by CS's reinforcement of this alignment at line 292.

Discussion

It will be evident that the relationship depicted here is quite hierarchical, largely consisting of CS exhorting and directing SL towards accepting and reproducing his preferred approach, and SL appearing to agree with this. Details of biographical and institutional context provided earlier may be helpful in explaining why the interactions have this appearance. Other articles from this project (Li and Seale, 2007a, 2007b) report some less one-sided exchanges, suggesting that the topic of a sociological identity may have been one perceived by SL and CS to require particularly firm direction. At any rate, the relevance of this case study

for other supervisory experiences needs to take account of the particular character of this one, which will not necessarily be the same as other supervisions.

Additionally, the limited range of materials drawn on for this analysis (albeit a far greater range than in any other study of the doctoral experience) means that other aspects of the experience that undoubtedly contributed to the enculturation experience are not discussed. These include, for example, discussions with fellow PhD students, which were highly influential on SL both in informing her about how to acquire a sociological identity and in providing emotional and practical support.

Note, too, that our use of the term 'identity' has until now been presented as unproblematic. Interactionist theory (e.g. Becker, 1964) understands 'identity' to be a constantly shifting performance, adjusted in accord with the actor's perception of what is required for a successful passage through a social situation. In other words, it is a matter of constant negotiation and impression management for strategic purposes. But this performative view of identity can encourage a view that personal commitment to a particular social identity is a superficial matter. Social psychological views of personal identity, even where they incorporate social constructionist perspectives (e.g. Gergen, 1991), retain a stronger sense of an authentic or 'inner' commitment to particular identities. This, of course, raises the question of the authenticity of SL's commitment to what we have called her 'sociological identity'. Perhaps her signals of agreement with CS's views are purely strategic, without any underlying 'inner' commitment?

Given these provisos, the study nevertheless appears to reveal a process of academic socialization from an applied identity in nursing to a pure identity in sociology, so that a 'social problems' perspective is transformed into a 'sociological problem'. The main strategies offered to SL for achieving the identity change are those of bracketing and distancing, accompanied at times by insistent exhortatory and obligatory messages from CS. Tensions between the disciplines of nursing and of sociology are apparent. Nursing involves an orientation towards practical outcomes and particular value positions. The 'pure' version of sociology CS advocated involves a sceptical and critical stance that challenges and disrupts the stability of such professional projects. There are some critical moments of separation and transition from a nursing to a sociological identity and SL's new membership identity is achieved via a process of what Goffman calls 'stripping ... trimming [and] ... programming' (1968: 26). Bracketing and distancing are designed to encourage mental separation from SL's previous identity position as a nurse, while exhortation and obligation are used to encourage reprogramming as a sociologist, an identity that SL was powerfully motivated to pursue, perhaps an explanation for her particular willingness to accept direction that adds to the explanations derived from our knowledge of her cultural, gender and educational background.

Becher speaks of the 'characteristic attitudes, activities, and cognitive styles' (1987: 275) of different disciplines which help shape and produce disciplinary knowledge and identity. In this study, SL is gradually initiated into CS's version of the departmental sociology culture, which he presents as a 'pure' type of sociology, achieving this distinction by his own rhetorical distancing of this

identity from other 'quasi' or 'half' sociologists he identifies as occupying an alternative and inferior position. In this sense he is like the nurses SL studied, who maintained and presented their own strong sense of professional specialty through the telling of 'atrocious stories' about other kinds of health professionals whose skill-deficit behaviour is presented in a disparaging light.

The situatedness of our observation supports Tierney's (1991) argument that the influence of local institutional context, not solely the power of disciplines, is important in the process of enculturation and cultural socialization into academic disciplinary knowledge. Yet the activities involved in the socialization of SL also help her to claim membership of a particular discipline independently of the particular location in which she has served her apprenticeship. Delamont et al. say that:

a discipline furnishes its members with definitions of what is 'thinkable', with appropriate assumptions as to what 'count' as research problems, suitable research methods, definitions of research programmes and the approved modes of graduate student research. (2000: 173)

Albeit in the context of a particular departmental culture, SL has 'learned the rules' necessary to claim membership of a broader sociological community. This is therefore a case study of what Delamont et al. call the 'protracted and intensive intellectual apprenticeship ... [whereby] ... students are progressively initiated into the mysteries of the subject' (2000: 181). We have uncovered some of the specific 'mechanisms of reproduction, continuity and stability' described in general terms by Delamont et al., (2000) using a method that gives us direct access to the particular activities involved in this socialization process.

The broader issue, of the desirability of this pure (Becher, 1987) or professional (Burawoy, 2005) version of sociology, whose practical engagement with policy makers' or practitioners' concerns is at best uneasy, is a matter which we prefer to leave open, although this study demonstrates some of the personal consequences of the tension between pure and other approaches. In this detailed case study we have shown how personal biographies and institutional context provide a setting for particular interactions to be motivated and deployed, resulting in the production of a person capable of carrying off the successful performance of a 'pure' sociological identity.

Our study describes some detailed mechanisms involved in the enculturation of graduate students, currently lacking in the research literature on doctoral supervision. We hope that our findings will generate further interest in observational studies of the PhD process. We do not claim that our findings are representative of all supervisions since they are based on a single longitudinal case study, generalization from which must be modified by the reflections we have provided on its context (Yin, 1994). We acknowledge that local context, cultural difference and gendered role expectations may have influenced the events we have described, particularly the hierarchical nature of the relationship. The PhD projects worked on by other students and supervisors might involve different socialization mechanisms, particularly if these involve same gender pairings, UK background students or younger students who have no

alternative professional identity to shake off. We welcome the prospect of further observational research of the sort we present here. This will extend the evidence base in this field, where there is currently an excessive reliance on second-hand accounts of supervisions derived from interviews.

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Sarah Li

Is a Senior Lecturer in applied sociology in health, medicine and social work; and palliative care, loss and bereavement. Her research interests include cross-cultural studies in ageing and palliative care needs of long-term conditions. She has published research papers on her PhD theses: symbiotic niceness in Social Science and Medicine and Qualitative Health Research, and on the supervisor–student relationship in PhD supervisions. Her current research involves an exploration of the views of older Chinese residents on privacy and dignity in residential homes in the UK.

Address: Faculty of Health and Social Care Sciences, Sir Frank Lamp's Building, Kingston Hill Campus, Kingston Hill, Surrey KT2 7LB, UK.

E-mail: sli@hscs.sghms.ac.uk

Clive Seale

Is Professor of sociology at Brunel University, with interests in medical sociology and social research methods. His recent work concerns end-of-life decision-making by doctors, interaction in health care settings and representations of health and illness in the mass media and on the internet. His books include *Constructing Death* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), *The Quality of Qualitative Research* (SAGE, 1999) *Media and Health* (SAGE, 2003) and *Researching Society and Culture* (SAGE, 2004).

Address: Department of Sociology, Brunel University, Uxbridge, Middlesex UB8 3PH, UK.

E-mail: Clive.Seale@brunel.ac.uk