

Laura Gets Her PhD. A Satire in Seven Acts¹

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[Loss of Our Colleague Angelika Birck](#)

Key words:

single-case
analysis, university
as a research
topic, power
structures, science
as a profession,
dissertation

Abstract: Abstract: This is a fictional text. It is the creative by-product of writing a doctoral thesis and a retrospective, memory distorted, and entirely non-academic reflection of this process. All statements are subjective, emotional and purely fictitious. Therefore, this description does not allow any conclusions about real persons or events in the present or in past times. No similarity to persons, either living or dead is intended.

This is the story of the psychologist Laura Wolf, who tries to obtain her doctorate studying the recovery processes of victims of sexual violence during childhood. Laura is confronted with a variety of conflicts within the university, rigid power structures, which cannot be overcome, bureaucratic obstacles, and personal vanity. These barriers are amplified by individual reactions to her thesis topic.

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Characters:

PhD candidate Laura Wolf, plus:

in Austerlich:

Professor Krämer

Professor Drechsler

Legal advisor

Mrs Professor Ziegler

Mrs Glaser in a women's centre

Psychoanalyst

Dean Professor Kesselflicker

University employees, secretaries, and others

1 This text is a slightly modified version of the initial publication: Birck, Angelika (2001). Chronologie einer Doktorarbeit. In Angelika Birck, Die Verarbeitung sexualisierter Gewalt in der Kindheit bei Frauen in der Psychotherapie (pp.269-287). Berlin: Behandlungszentrum für Folteropfer Berlin.

in Tomania:

Professor Seiler

Mrs Professor Sattelmacher

Dr. Zimmermann

Professor Bogner

Professor Tuchweber

Dean Professor Drahtzieher

University employees, secretaries, civil servants, and others

First Act: Starting in Austerlich (Year 1995)

Scene 1: In the secretary's office of a university institute

Secretary: I'm afraid, Mrs Wolf, that it's absolutely impossible to get an appointment with Professor Krämer within the next two months. [1]

Laura: It's about my doctorate in Psychology. I'd like to study how women who have experienced sexual violence in their past are coping with it as adults during their psychotherapy. I've already spoken with Professor Krämer's assistant, Mr Dr. Böttcher, who advised me to address Professor Krämer. [2]

Secretary: But you know very well, that this isn't possible right now. Professor Krämer takes care of more than one hundred undergraduates, because he's the only professor at the Institute. And as head of the Institute he constantly has to attend meetings and other events. You first have to make a written request, explaining why you want to see him, and then you are placed on the waiting list for an appointment, if you insist on having one. But as I can tell you now, this will take two months for sure before your turn comes around. Given two thousand psychology students and only one Professor there isn't much that we can do. [3]

Scene 2: In the office of Professor Drechsler

Laura: Thank you very much Professor Drechsler for giving me an appointment. I have sent you my concept for a dissertation earlier and would now like to discuss it with you. [4]

Professor Drechsler: Yes, I've read it. I think it's very interesting. As you know, Professor Sattler and myself have been working on the same subject. It all started when a surprising number of female patients on this psychosomatic ward told me that they were sexually abused during their childhood. Have you already discussed your concept with Professor Krämer? [5]

- Laura: I have sent it to him, but have not received any feedback yet. It is always very difficult to get an appointment with him and apart from that I still need someone else. Before I can register the project with the Dean's Office and officially start working on it, the institute's chair must confirm the second supervisor. [6]
- Professor Drechsler: Try to find out if I can act as your supervisor regardless of my background in medicine. But in any case I'm very interested in your work and I think it is very important. I can think of some of my patients here whom you might want to interview and who would be willing to speak to you. Tell Mr Krämer that I would be happy to act as your second supervisor. And call me as soon as you have more information. [7]

Scene 3: In the office of Professor Krämer

- Professor Krämer: OK, what's up? [8]
- Laura: Some months ago I sent you a proposal for my dissertation and would like to discuss it with you. [9]
- Professor Krämer: (*digging into papers*): Yes, right, here it is. I must tell you, this is a very difficult topic. Why do you want to interview the women themselves? I think it would be better to conduct interviews with experts and therapists about what they think is important during therapy. [10]
- Laura: I am interested precisely in the views of the affected women, which is why I wanted to interview them. There are already papers about what therapists think is important, but hardly anything about the relevant women's point of view. [11]
- Professor Krämer: But how do you think you will find these women? I can tell you now, that you won't be able to get a sufficiently large sample together. [12]
- Laura: I've spoken with Professor Drechsler, who said that on his ward I would certainly find women who would agree to be interviewed. Professor Drechsler has also agreed to assume the role of second supervisor. [13]
- Professor Krämer: You should get that thought right out of your head, a physician cannot become your supervisor. I have to assume that role myself. And apart from that, I don't believe that you will easily find women ready to talk about it. I consider this to be a very questionable idea by the way. [14]
- Laura: What exactly do you think is questionable? [15]

- Professor Krämer: I don't think you can ethically justify asking the women directly. Consider how much damage you could cause if the women are forced to speak about it. [16]
- Laura: The conversations are of course voluntary, and I thought I would discuss at the beginning with each of them what exactly they might expect and explain what each woman might be able to do, if she gets worked-up, who to talk to, where to go, what options for support are available to her. [17]
- Professor Krämer: I still consider it highly dubious from an ethical point of view. Speaking to the women directly will just add to their trauma. [18]
- Laura: Well, I'll ask some therapists working with those affected what they think about this. [19]

Scene 4: Again in the office of Professor Krämer

(Several months later)

- Professor Krämer: So, what's up? [20]
- Laura: It's about my dissertation. I have sent you my new proposal with the methodology section described in more detail and would like to talk to you about it. [21]
- Professor Krämer: *(rummaging through his papers)*: I haven't received it. In any case it isn't here. Send it to me again. [22]
- Laura: Moreover, I have also been talking to some psychotherapists since our last discussion. I have asked them, what they think about my wanting to conduct interviews with women on the subject of sexual violence experienced in their childhood. All of them said that if it was voluntary, if I asked as openly as possible and if I told them beforehand that the conversation might bring up bad memories and how to cope with them, they had no ethical concerns. [23]
- Professor Krämer: But you will hardly find people wanting to talk to you about it. You won't reach the required sample size. [24]
- Laura: Professor Drechsler will help me with that, plus some therapists I have talked to. I also wanted to ask you on which grounds you are refusing to accept Mr Drechsler as my second supervisor? [25]
- Professor Krämer: He's a physician and as a physician he cannot supervise a dissertation in psychology. [26]

- Laura: I've spoken to the student representative. They've told me that the supervisor may also be from another related subject area. Professor Drechsler works in the psychosomatics department, and I know that he has already supervised other psychologists in the past. [27]
- Professor Krämer: Well, you've been given the wrong information. [28]
- Laura: I've made copies of the university law in which it clearly states that a professor from another department can serve as second supervisor for a PhD. [29]
- Professor Krämer: (*shouting*): There is no bypassing me if you want to do your dissertation! I don't accept Mr Drechsler! I'm not interested in anything else! If you don't like it, you can take your university law and go to the federal ministry, but be warned, my connections there are better than yours! Let's see how far you get! [30]

Scene 5: At the office of the student representative

- Laura: What do I need to do, if I want to change to a different university in Austerlich, or if I want to switch to a university in Tomania? [31]
- Legal advisor: Both are very difficult. Have you already found another professor in psychology, to whom you would want to switch? Changing within Austerlich might be possible. Going to Tomania is very difficult, since we aren't yet a member of the EU, and universities don't mutually recognise each other's degrees. You would then probably need to retake exams at the other university, because the course programmes are different. I would suggest you switch to another university in Austerlich or simply try to get along with Mr Krämer. [32]

Scene 6: In the office of Professor Ziegler

- Professor Ziegler: In principle, what you describe in your proposal is all very interesting. Unfortunately, you don't address the discussion about false memories at all! It has been shown that there can be false memories about sexual abuse in children. If you want to examine how people cope with sexual abuse, you have to be careful not to include false memories. You need to be able to recognize and exclude false stories about child abuse. [33]

Scene 7: In the office of Professor Seiler

Professor Seiler: *(leaning back in his armchair making a phone call)*: I have read your proposal. Yes, I would be prepared to supervise something like that. But you will need to make some changes concerning the methodology. I will send you some forms so you can see what we are using here. What do you mean, ethical concerns? Why? No, I don't think so. Why should they not be able to talk about it? OK, the discussion about false memories, that is a setback, indeed. Scientifically speaking, they can't justify that though! Don't worry about that. Check with Mr Krämer about how this would work if I were to become your supervisor and I'll see that somebody sends you some information. [34]

Scene 8: In the office of Professor Krämer

Laura: I have found a psychology professor, specialised in psychic trauma who would like to supervise my dissertation, Professor Seiler from Tomania. [35]

Professor Krämer: I see—from Tomania, is he. And he agreed to supervise your dissertation? [36]

Laura: Yes. [37]

Professor Krämer: Then tell him straight away that our university has no funds for travel expenses. He has to come over here for the final exam. And we won't cover that. Also, there are no funds for him to give a lecture here. Tell him all this. How do you imagine it would work? [38]

Laura: I will go to meet him now and then, send him stuff, phone and email him. [39]

Professor Krämer: What kind of professor is that? What are his qualifications? [40]

Laura: He is a professor and director of the Institute of Psychology at the University of Ukbar. [41]

Professor Krämer: Tell him, that I need to have something in writing, saying that he will supervise you. I'll make some enquiries about him. You'll also have to participate in Ph.D. seminars. At this institute there are no such seminars, maybe you can do that elsewhere. If need be, I can confirm the necessary hours for you at the end. [42]

Scene 9: Laura making a phone call

- Laura: Good morning, Professor Krämer, I wanted to ask if you had received the confirmation from Professor Seiler stating that he will be supervising my dissertation. [43]
- Professor Krämer: Yes, I have. [44]
- Laura: Are you happy with it? [45]
- Professor Krämer: I'll think about it. [46]
- Laura: I would like to register my dissertation this year with the Dean's Office, and to do that I need a second supervisor. [47]
- Professor Krämer: There is no hurry, you can do that later. I'll let you know later. [48]

(After several weeks and many more phone calls on the same subject Laura receives a notification from the dean's office that Professor Seiler has been accepted as second supervisor.) [49]

Second Act: International Cooperation (Year 1996)

Scene 1: In the office of Professor Seiler

- Professor Seiler: *(having piles of papers on the table, among them letters and texts written by Laura)*: Well, we need to think about our approach. I think it's a good idea to do these interviews, but you have to clarify a few things on the procedural side. We have created a new questionnaire that should be finished very soon. It is very well suited for your work, and you absolutely have to make use of it. And then there is also another questionnaire, which we developed for the ZAP project, which you will also use. Doing so will provide you with a good overview which you can then relate to the interviews. Call Mrs Wagner and ask her to send you the questionnaire. [50]
- Laura: *(skimming through the draft versions of both questionnaires)*: These are more than fifty pages! It will take hours to complete such a thing. I'm afraid it will be difficult to motivate people to fill out such a questionnaire. [51]
- Professor Seiler: It isn't as bad as it looks. After all, we have already used it ourselves. It takes people about an hour to complete. [52]

- Laura: It would take me longer just to read it. And then the interviewee needs to stop at every question and think about how true it is before and after the therapy. I have never seen something like this before. [53]
- Professor Seiler: The big advantage is that we can ask for the subjective changes. We already have some quite promising results from a pre-study, which you can use for comparison, and there we can also include the data from your sample. In the case of your study, this questionnaire is ideal and you have to use it. [54]
- Laura: (*still not convinced*): It will be difficult to convince Professor Krämer in Austerlich about this. [55]
- Professor Seiler: Don't worry about it! Right now, this questionnaire is being used in a federal study of the Tomanian Psychotherapy Association. Mrs Kürschner and Mr Messermacher were involved in its development. Tell Mrs Wagner to send you the questionnaire as soon as it is ready. [56]

Scene 2: In the office of Professor Krämer

- Professor Krämer: You say you have sent me the questionnaire? I haven't got it. Make another copy of it for me. [57]
- Laura: I have got another copy with me and would like to discuss it with you and see if you agree with it. [58]
- Professor Krämer: I cannot decide this while leafing through it. I need to take a closer look at it. Make a copy for me and we will discuss it next time. [58a]
- Laura: Unfortunately, whenever I try to set up a meeting with you, your secretary says it takes months to get one. [59]
- Professor Krämer: Right, in America that is totally different. Here it is impossible to get any work done because of all these meetings. Now we have all these negotiations with the ministry concerning the new guideline. I really have to do something about it. Did I tell you that I will be first at the conference in Saalbruck next week? (*Goes on narrating like this, until being interrupted.*) [60]
- Laura: Well, that is quite exciting, but haven't I given you some pages about the interview, describing how I want to go about it? I would like to know what you think about it. [61]
- Professor Krämer: (*looking at his watch*): That is something we need to talk about next time, because unfortunately I need to get to another very important meeting. May I show you the way out ...? [62]

Scene 3: Months later in the office of Professor Krämer

- Professor Krämer: Well, you cannot use this questionnaire. The individual scales contain questions, which don't fit at all together! The other questionnaire is quite okay, but you have to skip this one. It is also much too long. [63]
- Laura: I agree with that, but Professor Seiler insists on using this questionnaire. It is, by the way, also being used in a big study of the Tomanian Psychotherapy Association. [64]
- Professor Krämer: Let's talk about that again later. The Psychotherapist Association of Austerlich is also preparing a study. They are having difficulties with the interviews, although the topic isn't as difficult as yours. What's the problem with interviews? Recently, a psychologist working as a psychotherapist in his own ward wanted to write a dissertation about his patients. This is always quite difficult, because in this case he was part of the situation himself and couldn't look at it objectively. That is what I told him, and finally it wasn't enough for a dissertation. And it was quite similar with Mrs Steinmetz, who wrote about ... (*goes on narrating*). [65]

(*At some later time Professor Krämer responds to Laura's question, about what to do with the interviews and the questionnaire; she should do whatever she thinks to be appropriate.*) [66]

Scene 4: In a women's centre

- Mrs Glaser: Mrs Wolf, I consider this to be a very important project. Unfortunately, in Austerlich there aren't many studies in that field, and especially in the countryside this topic is still quite taboo. [67]
- Laura: Do you think that the women you know would be willing to talk to me for this project? [68]
- Mrs Glaser: It will be difficult, but let me think about it—I can think of one or two women who would agree to talk to you. One of them is quite active in this respect too. I can imagine her being up for something like this. Shall I give them your phone number? [69]
- Laura: Yes please, and please tell them that I would first like to inform them about the contents of the interview, and that they can decide afterwards if they want to participate or not. They don't have to have their minds made up when they call me, they can first listen to what I want to do, ask questions and think it over. [70]

Scene 5: Inside a therapy room of a psychoanalyst

Psychoanalyst: Well, I understand you are looking for people to interview. But I really cannot help you here. I have heard this only happened rarely. I think that is very exaggerated, I cannot image this to happen that often. [71]

Laura: Why do you think it is exaggerated? [72]

Psychoanalyst: I have been working for more than ten years as an analyst and so far I have never seen a single case like this. If it happen that often, it would have also occurred to one of my patients. But it never has. [73]

Scene 6: In the office of Professor Drechsler

Professor Drechsler: When can we start conducting the interviews? [74]

Laura: Next week as far as I'm concerned. [75]

Professor Drechsler: Good, then next week you can use Mr Schlosser's office for the interviews because he is on vacation now. Let me introduce you now to two of my patients. You can arrange meetings with them yourself. [76]

Third Act: Data Acquisition (Year 1997)

Scene 1: In the office of Professor Krämer

Professor Krämer: So I see you are making progress with your interviews. The text I received from you is quite okay as it is. I have made some grammatical corrections, and you will have to increase the font size from ten to thirteen. We'll have to leave the details for later as I am in a hurry today. Come on, we can continue to talk while walking ... [77]

Scene 2: In the office of Professor Seiler

Professor Seiler: *(on the phone)*: Yes, I have received your text. These are really cool results! We have to publish them! Your results underline exactly what we keep saying over here. I am the editor of a publication series appearing at Importance Press and we can surely write something about it there. By the way I just finished my own study, which was a monumental success. Things are starting to change and they will continue to change. We are celebrating here with some champagne. Oh, have you received my study already? I asked someone to send it to you. It will also be interesting for you to know what we have discovered. All right, yes, send me more stuff as soon as you have something new. [78]

Scene 3: In the office of Professor Krämer

Professor Krämer: So you have already discussed this with Mr Seiler? [79]

Laura: Yes. I wanted to discuss it with you earlier, but didn't get an appointment. [80]

Professor Krämer: Nevertheless you need to discuss it with me first, if you want to do it like this. [81]

Laura: That is why I sent you my text, and as I haven't undertaken anything further I hoped we could discuss it today. [82]

Professor Krämer: Today is too bad. I have another meeting right now. How many interviews have you already conducted? [83]

Laura: Almost twenty. [84]

Professor Krämer: I have read your text. The evaluation of the questionnaires is something we have to talk about again. Make a copy of your questionnaire for me. And please make the font size smaller in your text, it is much too big like this. [85]

(After this Laura decides to discuss all content-related issues with Professor Seiler.) [86]

Fourth Act: Endgame? (Year 1998)

Scene 1: In the office of Professor Seiler

Professor Seiler: This has become quite a nice study. What is Professor Krämer's opinion? [87]

- Laura: I sent him my work months ago, but haven't received any kind of response. I also cannot reach him on the phone. [88]
- Professor Seiler: Don't worry, the work is very well done. We can discuss it together with Mr Krämer and then you can submit it. [89]
- Laura: I hope Professor Krämer agrees with you. [90]
- Professor Seiler: It isn't quite his field of expertise, after all. Unfortunately, he doesn't know much about our methodology. In some years others will also realize that this method really takes us further. I described this in detail in the book that I just published. You can use it when talking to Mr Krämer. I will send it to you. At the moment we are developing a second, computer-based version of it. By the way, have you seen the first version? [91]
- Laura: No, I didn't know there was an automated version. I have evaluated all interviews manually. [92]
- Professor Seiler: Well, in the future using our new method will be much faster and easier. Other institutes must now use it so we can compare our data. Talk to Mr Kessler, he can explain it to you! Moreover, we are participating in a new project in which we had to invest a lot of energy. This is going to be big. [93]

Scene 2: Laura making a phone call

- Laura: Good morning, Professor Krämer. Your secretary gave me an appointment for the consultation hours on December 23, at fourteen hours. I would like to ask if there was another possible date perhaps a week earlier, as I am no longer living in Austerlich, but eight hundred kilometres away in Tomania where I have found a job. It would be very difficult for me to come to Austerlich on December 23. [94]
- Professor Krämer: Unfortunately that is the only date I can offer you. Before then I have no openings and afterwards I am on vacation. [95]
- Laura: I have been waiting eight months for this appointment. Maybe I can call you and we discuss my work on the phone? [96]
- Professor Krämer: Absolutely not. It is mandatory for you to come here. [97]
- Laura: I cannot see the difference between talking for fifteen minutes in your office or calling you on the phone. [98]
- Professor Krämer: (*annoyed*): You have to come here! [99]
- Laura: And what about sending me something in writing, so we can make a new appointment after your vacation? [100]
- Professor Krämer: Either you are here on the given date or my secretary puts you

Krämer: on the waiting list again. [101]

Scene 3: In the office of Professor Krämer

- Professor Krämer: Well, I cannot accept what you have sent me. With the topic you chose, one cannot write a scientific study. But it is too late to change that. The questionnaire you have used is totally unscientific! How do you expect to find out anything retrospectively? And what kind of questionnaire is this anyway? [102]
- Laura: It is the questionnaire I had copied for you many times. About a year ago you said I could use it if I liked. [103]
- Professor Krämer: In any case you cannot make an evaluation like this. You have to do this all over again. You have to add the questions differently, the scales are completely useless. [104]
- Laura: I have calculated the scales following the recommendations of the authors of the questionnaire. I have also provided the references. [105]
- Professor Krämer: Nevertheless, you need to do it differently. One cannot make an evaluation like this. [106]
- Laura: But I cannot simply evaluate a questionnaire as I see fit! I stuck to the authors' recommendations. [107]
- Professor Krämer: It isn't just the questionnaire. The whole concept behind the study isn't a scientific one. Your methodology does not detect objective changes. [108]
- Laura: But I wanted to ask for the subjective estimates of the women, which are of course not objective changes in symptoms! Why are you criticizing my concept now, when the work is almost finished? I always sent you texts and asked you about them. You never commented on the content so why should I do something differently now? [109]
- Professor Krämer: Well, if you had come more often to my consultation hours! [110]
- Laura: I always had to wait for months to get an appointment! And when I was in your office we never talked for more than fifteen minutes about formal things. [111]
- Professor Krämer: Don't use that tone of voice with me! As it is I won't accept your work. You will have to rewrite it again! [112]
- Laura: But I cannot restart it from scratch! I can change something concerning the interpretation or the theoretical part, but I cannot re-evaluate the study! And when I didn't get an appointment with you I discussed all steps with Professor Seiler. He does agree with my work and I don't think he will accept it if I evaluate the questionnaire other than how the authors specified. [113]

Professor Krämer: (*roaring*): Like this I certainly will not accept this work! And I don't need to listen to a student telling me such ridiculous things and using such ridiculous arguments! Your whole work is ridiculous! [114]

Laura: (*interrupting him*): I won't let you describe me as being ridiculous! I won't let you treat me like this! All this after changing my plans for Christmas to come to this appointment! You could have told me all this over the phone, having to start all over from scratch! [115]

Professor Krämer: (*still roaring*): You don't even want to understand, it is impossible to argue with you! Then do whatever you like with your work! [116]

(*Laura rushes out.*) [117]

Scene 4: In the street with Professor Drechsler

(*An accidental meeting on the same day.*)

Laura: And that was the least insulting thing he said to me. In any case I cannot stay with him. [118]

Professor Drechsler: (*calmed*): Don't worry, there will be a solution. If I can help you in any way please call. [119]

Laura: I first have to find out if it is possible to change supervisors. I have an appointment tomorrow with Dean Kesselflicker. [120]

Professor Drechsler: Tell me as soon as you know more. And nevertheless, Merry Christmas! [121]

Scene 5: In the dean's office

Laura: I would like to ask if and how it is possible to change my first supervisor while working on my dissertation. [122]

Dean Professor Kesselflicker: (*wearing a pair of black leather trousers*): In principle this is quite possible, but it has to be justified and the Head of the Faculty has to agree. [123]

Laura: It is about Professor Krämer, who is my first supervisor and head of the faculty at the same time. He will certainly not agree with a change. [124]

Dean Professor Kesselflicker: You should still discuss this with him. [125]

Laura: He already told me it isn't possible to bypass him. This is why I am addressing you. [126]

- Dean
Professor
Kesselflicker: *(sliding deeper into his seat, spreading his legs wide)*: It is true that the dean is responsible. But the case is like this: I am a chemist and have no clue about psychology. Therefore I am not authorized to decide on issues in psychology. So for all matters concerning psychology I have assigned Professor Krämer as my representative. [127]
- Laura: But this is about formal issues, which you can decide yourself! [128]
- Dean
Professor
Kesselflicker: As I have already told you, for all issues related to the faculty of psychology you must address Professor Krämer, just as if he were the dean. [129]
- Laura: *(in disbelief)*: But how can this be possible! In this case he is my first supervisor, head of the faculty, and dean, united in the same person! How should it be possible to sort out an argument in case of doubt? It cannot be true that all roles of three different hierarchical levels are united in the same hands! Whom shall I address here? [130]
- Dean
Professor
Kesselflicker: *(smiling)*: You can still address the federal ministry. But usually they will adopt the opinion of the head of the faculty or of the dean, that is, my representative Professor Krämer. [131]

Scene 6: Laura in a telephone booth

(It is snowing.)

- Laura: This is the situation as it is. My only chance is changing to a different university. [133]
- Professor
Seiler: This is unpleasant, indeed. But Mr Krämer has always had strange opinions. [134]
- Laura: Do you think it is possible for me to graduate from your faculty? [135]
- Professor
Seiler: That should be no problem. I would become your first supervisor. In this case you should apply quickly to our university. We will find a second supervisor, no problem. Heads up! We will manage all this after the New Year. [136]

Fifth Act: Change to the University in Tomania (Year 1999)

Scene 1: Laura making a phone call

- Secretary: Well, if you want to apply to study here, you first need an admission. What do you want to apply for? [137]
- Laura: For a dissertation in psychology. [138]

- Secretary: For a dissertation you might not need an admission. That is something you have to find out. [139]
- Laura: What else do I need for the registration? [140]
- Secretary: Well, all the certificates, like high school diploma, final certificate and so on. And the confirmation that you are no longer enrolled at another university. I'll send you a list with everything you need. [141]
- Laura: Is it ok if I send copies of everything? [142]
- Secretary: Yes, but then you'd need to notarise them. [143]
- Laura: And what about acknowledging a degree in psychology from Austerlich? [144]
- Secretary: Did you get a masters degree in psychology? [145]
- Laura: No, a magister, but in Austerlich that is the same as a masters in Tomania. [146]
- Secretary: I'm not sure about that. Did you graduate from high school in Tomania? [147]
- Laura: No, in Austerlich. [148]
- Secretary: If you are a foreigner from the EU—wait, I am looking for a brochure (rustling)—it says, you need to take a language test. [149]
- Laura: I am from Austerlich, where people speak German. Surely I won't be required to take a language test! [150]
- Secretary: But it says, foreigners from inside the EU have to prove they are capable of speaking German by taking a language test. [151]
- Laura: These rules probably stem from the time before Austerlich was part of the EU and there weren't any foreigners inside the EU speaking German. Austerlich is a German speaking country, hence I won't take a language test. Otherwise I will take it to court. [152]
- Secretary: (*browsing*): The guidelines are from the 1980s. Well, maybe you're right Let's make an exception in this case. [153]
- Laura: So you will send me a list of all items I need? [154]
- Secretary: Yes. You can already apply, but you will definitely need an acknowledgement of your university degree from Austerlich if you want to write your dissertation here. [155]
- Laura: And how do I get that? [156]
- Secretary: You will have to ask for that in the student administrative office. Let me give you the phone number. [157]

Scene 2: Laura making a phone call to the student administrative office

- Laura: I would like to know how to get an acknowledgement for my degree in psychology, which I received in Austerlich. [158]
- Secretary: What do you need that for? [159]
- Laura: I would like to write my dissertation at your university. [160]
- Secretary: I can't tell you either. You'd do better to just come over here. [161]
- Laura: Is it more likely for you to know when I am there? I don't live in Ukbar, and I won't make a trip without knowing which documents I need to bring. [162]
- Secretary: I can't tell you anything about that. You should ask some of the psychologists, their faculty has someone dealing with issues of degree acknowledgement. [163]

Scene 3: Laura making a phone call with Dr Zimmermann, responsible for acknowledgements

- Dr. Zimmermann: You have been misinformed here, I am only responsible for acknowledging high school degrees. I have no idea about diploma degrees in psychology. [164]
- Laura: Who is responsible for that? [165]
- Dr. Zimmermann: You should ask someone in the state ministry, which has a department for acknowledgement issues. [166]

Scene 4: Laura making a phone call to the State Ministry

- Secretary: No, we don't have any such kind of acknowledgement procedure. You don't even need that, since Austerlich is part of the EU. Hence, diploma degrees are mutually acknowledged. [167]
- Laura: But the university requires some acknowledgement. [168]
- Secretary: Then they are misinformed. In any case, we don't issue any kind of acknowledgement for EU diplomas. Tell them that you don't need that at all! [169]

Scene 5: Laura making a phone call to the dean's office

- Laura: The faculty responsible as well as the State Ministry have told me that they don't issue such acknowledgements, because EU diplomas are now mutually acknowledged. [170]
- Secretary: All I can tell you is that for your dissertation exam you will need an acknowledgement of your curricula, without which you cannot

write your dissertation. The faculty should be able to issue that. [171]

Scene 6: Laura on the phone with Herr Dr Zimmermann

- Laura: What bureaucracy! I have been sent back to you. [172]
- Dr Zimmermann: All I can do is look at your individual certificates and compare your exams with those requested here. But a real match is very unlikely, since different universities always have different curricula. If something was missing then you would need to repeat that. [173]
- Laura: I fail to understand why I need that at all, since all official national offices keep telling me, that university degrees between Austerlich and Tomania are mutually acknowledged. [174]
- Dr Zimmermann: That is what I think too. I could write something for you to express that in my opinion you don't need anything like this. [175]
- Laura: Such a written confirmation would at least be something in my hands. But the dean's office will likely continue to ask for an acknowledgement. [176]

Scene 7: Laura calling the Kultuskonferenz

- Clerk: I really don't understand, you just don't need an acknowledgement! Not because Austerlich is in the EU, but because since 1983 there has been a mutual agreement between Tomania and Austerlich that covers the mutual acknowledgement of diplomas. Following this agreement university diplomas between these two countries have to be acknowledged. [177]
- Laura: At the university nobody seems to know that. Could you perhaps send me a copy of that agreement? [178]
- Clerk: I will. They have to acknowledge your diploma, and it needn't be examined individually. Otherwise you can check with an attorney. Although, that might be difficult, since he must be knowledgeable not only in university law, but also in EU law. I will first send you the agreement, and if that doesn't help I can also write directly to the university and explain how these mutual agreements work. [179]

Scene 8: Laura making a phone call

Laura: In any case the mutual agreement was of no help in the dean's office either. They continue asking for an acknowledgement from the psychology faculty. And there nobody is responsible. Or rather, they only want to compare individual exams, which means I would need to repeat certain exams. Would it be possible for you to simply confirm such an acknowledgement for me? [180]

Professor Seiler: At the moment I can't do that, because the request for my own institute hasn't been officially confirmed yet. There is another request pending, and probably only one of them will be approved. Wait a while, I think our chances are quite good, and after becoming the director of the institute I can sign the form for you. [181]

(And indeed: months later Professor Seiler officially becomes director of his own institute, the acknowledgement form is completed—showing that Laura needed more items for her degree in Austerlich than required at the University of Ukbar—Professor Seiler signs it and the dean's office accepts it. A year has passed over all of this.) [182]

Sixth Act: Accepted at Last! (Year 2000)

Scene 1: In the office of Professor Sattelmacher

Mrs Professor Sattelmacher: Yes, I have read your work. Concerning the content we will have to deal a lot with it. But let me tell you right away: you are using an unusual citation style. In a dissertation you need to stick to the citation style according to the guidelines of the Psychological Association of Tomania. [183]

Laura: I wrote it in Austerlich, where the citation guidelines of Tomania aren't mandatory. [184]

Mrs Professor Sattelmacher: In any case you have to change it if you want to get your degree in Tomania. [185]

Scene 2: In Laura's room, at night

(She is sitting in front of her PC, updating the meanwhile outdated work and changing every single reference to be compatible with the guidelines of the Psychological Association of Tomania.) [186]

Scene 3: In the office of Professor Seiler

Professor Seiler: *(on the phone)*: Concerning the second supervisor—let me think about it... Well, at that time I suggested Mr Hufschmied, but now I wouldn't recommend him any more. He also wanted to have his own institute, but his wasn't approved and mine was. Just last week he completely tore a dissertation of one of my Ph.D. students to shreds for totally trivial reasons. Before we always had a very good working relationship! Hence, I cannot recommend him to you. As you know, all of this isn't easy, because the qualitative method you are using isn't yet widely accepted. Of course I recommended it to you, and it is very useful indeed, but in Tomania it isn't very well known yet. Therefore, it is important for your second supervisor to have some idea about it. That makes me think of Professor Bogner at the University of Tlön, who has already used it. Just send him your work! Okay, then I will talk to him first. No, it is no problem at all for him to be at a different university in Tomania. You suggest him to the dean's office and I'll agree. Because of your method we can well justify that we need an external person. Then the dean will agree. Don't worry about it. There have never been any issues with that. [187]

Scene 4: Laura making a phone call

Laura: Have you received my work, Professor Bogner? What do you think? When will you be able to look at it? Yes, it will certainly be a lot of work. I am grateful that you have agreed to accept investigating it. When should I contact you again? Okay, six months from now. Not before summer time. [188]

Scene 5: Laura making a phone call

Laura: I feel so glad and relieved that you agree with my work! Of course there are some details that need to be changed. And how do we proceed from here? Yes, Mr Seiler also agrees. So I can submit it, now? Right, I fully agree with you, I would also like to take the exam this Semester! [189]

(Laura submits her work to the dean's office. She hands in a justified request asking for Professor Bogner of the University of Tlön to become her second supervisor.) [190]

Scene 6: Laura making a phone call

- Secretary: I could have told you right away. Mr Drahtzieher always rejects external professors as second supervisor. [191]
- Laura: The information I have is quite different. Professor Seiler and I have just technically justified, why Professor Bogner should be doing it! [192]
- Secretary: Our dean's opinion is that we have enough psychologists right here. Therefore, one of them can judge your work and we don't need to ask someone from outside. [193]
- Laura: But I have used a method, which isn't at all well known! Therefore it is important for the supervisor to be familiar with it, in order to be able to judge the work. I have already cooperated with Professor Bogner, and he agreed to take over the investigation. It was also even arranged so that there won't be any costs for your university. Mr Seiler and Mr Bogner cooperate otherwise, so why should he not take care of the work! [194]
- Secretary: All I can tell you is that it has already been decided. Another supervisor has already been requested. [195]
- Laura: Then I would like to talk to Mr Dean Drahtzieher. [196]
- Secretary: You cannot do that now, he is in America for three weeks. [197]
- Laura: Surely it will be possible to reach him on the phone! [198]
- Secretary: You can reach him only when he comes back, which I wouldn't recommend. He will certainly not change his decision. [199]
- Laura: And who has been appointed as second supervisor? [200]
- Secretary: I'm not allowed to tell you. [201]
- Laura: Sorry, why can you not tell me? I'm not even allowed to know who is judging my work? [202]
- Secretary: You will receive an answer as soon as the appraisal is ready. Earlier than that I'm not allowed to tell you. [203]

Scene 7: Laura making a phone call

- Secretary: No, you cannot reach Professor Seiler, he is busy having meetings the whole day. [204]
- Laura: But it is important, it is about the appraisal of my dissertation! [205]
- Secretary: Yes, I have heard about it. I put the faxes you sent into Mr Seiler's bin. Hasn't he called you in the meantime? [206]

- Laura: No, I have heard nothing from him. For two days I have tried to reach him on all his phone numbers. [207]
- Secretary: Well, I know him. In such cases he likes to play dead. I will write another note, asking him to call you back. [208]
- Laura: I don't even know who my second supervisor is. [209]
- Secretary: You haven't been told that? Well, I would probably also not be allowed to tell you, but I have seen the letter from the dean's office. It is Professor Tuchweber. [210]
- Laura: Who is that? [211]
- Secretary: He is quite a nice guy. And he also listens to students, you know? Don't worry too much. [212]
- Laura: Could you connect me with him right now? [213]
- Secretary: He isn't here yet, and I don't know when he will be coming, but I can give you his phone number. [214]

Scene 8: Laura making a phone call

- Professor
Tuchweber: How come you suggested me of all people as your second supervisor? We don't even know each other! [215]
- Laura: This is a misunderstanding, I didn't suggested you at all, but rather Professor Bogner from Tlön. But the Dean has rejected him and instead he appointed you as my second supervisor. [216]
- Professor
Tuchweber: I have never heard of something like this before! Nobody has informed me about any of this! [217]
- Laura: Even I found out indirectly. [218]
- Professor
Tuchweber: But hasn't Mr Seiler talked to the Dean? [219]
- Laura: He even wrote a letter to suggest Professor Bogner and justified it with the method I am using throughout my work. [220]
- Professor
Tuchweber: But that means he must now go to the Dean and change that! [221]
- Laura: It seems like the Dean is in America for three weeks now. [222]
- Professor
Tuchweber: This is incredible! It looks like internal faculty conflicts being sorted out on the backs of the students. [223]
- Laura: I'll think about talking to the dean when he gets back. [224]

- Professor
Tuchweber: If I were you I wouldn't recommend that. If anybody can talk to him it is Professor Seiler. But if he doesn't Dean Drahtzieher will certainly not change his mind. And even if he did, he would surely not appoint Professor Bogner. Otherwise he would lose his face. I can do it just as well. [225]
- Laura: I have talked with Professor Bogner and he agreed to provide information about my work. I can give you his phone number, if you like. [226]
- Professor
Tuchweber: First I need to come to a conclusion myself. Then I will talk to Professor Seiler. [227]
- Laura: What do you think, how long will the appraisal take? [228]
- Professor
Tuchweber: Well, first I am going to a conference, then I'll be on vacation for two weeks. It won't be that fast, but you will be informed as soon as I am done. [229]

Scene 9: Laura making a phone call

- Professor
Seiler: No, Mrs Wolf, you don't have to worry at all. You have delivered a good piece of work. [230]
- Laura: But it was you who said the consultant should be someone who knows about the method, and Professor Tuchweber represents quite a different approach, like measuring skin resistance! How can he ever judge my qualitative method? Could you talk to the dean again? [231]
- Professor
Seiler: I will as soon as he is back from America. Until then Mr Tuchweber has already examined it and the result will be positive for sure. I am very certain about that. After all I am his boss and he works in my institute, so you really don't have to worry. [232]

Scene 10: Laura making a phone call

- Laura: In any case I learned that the dean hasn't appointed you, but somebody called Professor Tuchweber as the second supervisor. The reasoning was that there were enough psychologists at the University of Ukbar and therefore there was no need for an external appraisal. All this is very unpleasant for me, especially since you have already invested so much work. [233]
- Prof. Bogner: I have never experienced something like this! At our university this would never happen! These guys at the philosophy faculty of Ukbar seem to be quite old-fashioned and provincial as well if no external person is allowed to be involved! [234]

- Laura: I think it's outrageous that the work will now be judged by somebody from a totally different working field. [235]
- Prof. Bogner: It also means that Mr Seiler doesn't know his environment too well if he isn't informed about such procedures at his university and still suggested me. I am quite upset, since it was a considerable amount of work for me as well. [236]
- Laura: I am surprised that the dean's office or Professor Seiler haven't informed you yet. [237]
- Prof. Bogner: No, I haven't been informed. This is scandalous. I recommend you put some pressure on those two for your project to advance and have a happy ending. [238]

Scene 11: Laura making a phone call

- Laura: I was wondering how far along you were with the appraisal. [239]
- Professor
Tuchweber: Well, uhmm, as long as it isn't finished I'm not really allowed to tell you anything. [240]
- Laura: But have you come to a decision in the meantime? [241]
- Professor
Tuchweber: I have to warn you, I don't agree with some things. [242]
- Laura: What does that mean, do I need to worry in general about you accepting my work? [243]
- Professor
Tuchweber: At the moment I can't tell you anything about that, you will be informed by the dean's office. [244]

(After some pretty restless days, Laura learns that Professor Tuchweber will judge favourably her work, but asks for changes, which need to be presented, again.) [245]

Scene 12: Laura making a phone call

- Secretary: For the dissertation exam we will likely run out of appointments for this year. [246]
- Laura: But there are two months left! [247]
- Secretary: Not all six people who need to take the exam can take it during the possible dates this year. The next date is January 10th. [248]

Seventh Act: Finally Done? (Year 2001)

Scene 1: The dissertation exam

Professor
Tuchweber: You have explained now, why standardized psychological diagnostics is so difficult with traumatized refugees from non-western cultures. So I am asking myself, given all these difficulties, why aren't you using physiological parameters by simply measuring pulse frequency and skin resistance? [249]

Laura: How should I explain to a torture survivor that I need to connect an electric cable to one of his fingers? [250]

Professor
Tuchweber: But then you could measure the shock reaction time, which has proven to be a valid indicator for post-traumatic stress disorders. That shouldn't be too much to expect from him. [251]

Scene 2: In the office of Professor Seiler

Professor
Seiler: You have to look carefully at the change requests. Mr Tuchweber has expressed many points only as suggestions, so you don't have to implement them. Only concerning these two points he insists on changes, these conditions you have to meet. The others are suggestions, you can do what you like with them. And then you are done! Just send the revised version to Mr Tuchweber and me and we'll sign it. [252]

Scene 3: Laura making a phone call

Laura: Sorry? I need to send you the form for confirming the change once again? [253]

Secretary: Yes, it has been lost. [254]

Laura: But I stapled it to the revised version of my work, maybe it is still in there and hasn't been seen, maybe you could check again? [255]

Secretary: Unfortunately, the work itself also can't be found right now. I had to ask for the other version in order to make a copy. Please resend the form. [256]

Scene 4: Laura making a phone call

Laura: I would like to ask if you agree with my changes. [257]

Professor
Seiler: Of course, you can submit it to the dean's office. [258]

Laura: To do so I still need your signature on the form, which I resent you in the meantime. [259]

Professor Seiler: It is best to talk with my secretary, she will do that. [260]

Laura: But you have to sign! And then Professor Tuchweber as well. [261]

Professor Seiler: Talk to my secretary and ask Mr Tuchweber to sign, then to pass me the form and I will sign it as well. [262]

Scene 5: Laura making a phone call

Professor Tuchweber: No, I don't agree with your changes. You are still using the term "sexual violence", without sufficiently justifying it. And I told you to change your old title "Coping with sexual violence" into "Coping with a sexual abuse experience". [263]

Laura: Now I am quite irritated! I thought changing the title was a suggestion you made. I didn't know I had to change it! [264]

Professor Tuchweber: I don't understand you. Of course you have to change it, when I suggest doing so! You have simply not justified the term sexual violence. You cannot simply change the terminology without justifying it! You need to explain why you don't want to use the term abuse! [265]

Laura: But in the introduction I reasoned about why this is justified from my point of view, and I made a reference to the feminist debate. Moreover, I'm not the only one using the term sexual violence. After all, I sent you a whole list of institutions, among them a state workers union, which is also using the term sexual violence against children in this context! [266]

Professor Tuchweber: But this isn't a scientific justification. And the authors you are referencing also don't use the term sexual violence in a scientific way. You can't simply speak about violence like that if you mean abuse, and name some institutions. [267]

Laura: So you think there is no violence present when a child is being raped? [268]

Professor Tuchweber: But violence isn't always implied! There are also female offenders! You have to justify why it is always violence for you. If you like, you can do that by arguing with the severity of the infringement or with the child's age, but you have to justify it! After all the term violence also has legal implications! And if you think about the debate about sexual abuse in the psychotherapy, it doesn't always imply violence either. [269]

- Laura: It seems like we have a different understanding not only concerning the term "suggestion", but also the term "violence". [270]
- Professor
Tuchweber: You cannot change the definitions without providing a sufficient scientific justification! If you only claim it is violence, then it isn't science! It isn't the usual view, and therefore you need to justify why you are using different terminology! And it won't be easy to reason plausibly about your view of violence when speaking with lawyers! It would also have legal implications, if it is violence! Violence isn't always implicated in abuse! Moreover, you always mix scientific and therapeutic aspects in your work. [271]
- Laura: Here you also suggested to justify that, which is what I think I have done in the introduction. [272]
- Professor
Tuchweber: There you simply wrote that being confronted with traumatic experience causes intense emotional reactions with therapists and scientists, and stated like that it cannot be true. If that were the case, therapists would lose their professionalism when dealing with their clients, including offenders as well. With an attitude like this you cannot do justice to the offenders! You cannot simply claim that it always causes emotional reactions. It is unprofessional! Instead you need to ask for the readers' understanding that you, as a newcomer in the field haven't managed to stay emotionally neutral and hence scientific aspects are sometimes confused with therapeutic ones. [273]
- Laura: It would have been much easier for me if you had said clearly from the beginning that I had to change all that the way you like in order for you to accept my work. I thought that your suggestions were simply suggestions. Now I see I have to write it completely the way you like, if I want to finish my work some day. And I will make the changes, because I have to, not because I share your views! [274]
- Professor
Tuchweber: I don't understand what you mean! We discussed it! I explained it all to you! Of course you have to implement all my suggestions so I can accept your work! [275]

(Laura has to give in and changes everything following the orders of Professor Tuchweber. She has to publish her work in that way, despite the fact that she has a very contrary understanding of the topic.) [276]

Scene 6: Laura making a phone call

- Secretary: Yes, meanwhile we have received the form from Professor Seiler and Professor Tuchweber, which confirms your work. [277]
- Laura: That means I can simply publish the work electronically and put it on the server of the university. [278]
- Secretary: No, first you have to make a request for publishing the work electronically. [279]
- Laura: But there is an October 1999 resolution of the philosophy faculty saying that dissertations can be published electronically on the university library server! [280]
- Secretary: You still have to request it individually, then it will be discussed during the next faculty meeting and then you will get a response. [281]
- Laura: And when will the next faculty meeting take place? [282]
- Secretary: Oh, that will be next semester, but you can already send us an informal request. [283]

(Two months later the request is being granted. Laura passes the electronic version to the university library and sends two copies to the dean's office. Two months later she receives a PhD certificate.) [284]

Scene 7: Laura making a phone call

- Laura: I have now received a Ph.D. certificate, but it uses the old title of my work instead of the one I had to use for the publication. [285]
- Secretary: And the title you want was confirmed by the advisors ? [286]
- Laura: Not only confirmed, but prescribed. You must have received the form confirming the changes, which explains it all. [287]
- Secretary: In any case, in order to change the title of the certificate, you have to send it back to us, and we will issue a new one, provided the form confirming the title is there. [288]

(Later, after several weeks and repeated phone calls, Laura eventually receives the correct certificate.) [289]

Loss of Our Colleague Angelika Birck

Our author Angelika Birck has passed away. She died suddenly on June 7, 2004 at the age of 32. Her death moved all of us very deeply. She dedicated her professional and personal efforts to victims of violence and torture. To *FQS* she contributed the text entitled "Laura's doctorate" under the section *FQS* Debates "Doing successful research in the social sciences—Ethnography of the Career Politics of an Occupational Group." She described the text as "literary and fictitious"—which it of course wasn't. It describes her experience in details while trying to earn her doctorate in the bureaucratic jungle of universities in two countries. When I learned about her troubles I encouraged her to publish a literary account of her story in our *FQS* Debate on ethnography in the social sciences. Now facing her sudden death and short life span this account is even more meaningful. We are glad and proud to have her as an author.

Angelika Birck's long-time life companion—Dinu Gherman—has set up a web site in her memory: <http://www.angelika-birck.info/>.

Franz Breuer on behalf of the Editorial Staff

Author

Angelika BIRCK, Ph.D., Psychologist, in pursuit of a degree in Behaviour Therapy. Her dissertation focused on sexual violence against children. From 1998-2004, she conducted scientific research at the Behandlungszentrum für Folteropfer Berlin (Center for the Treatment of Torture Victims).

Her research topics included: chronic and complex trauma, political and social frameworks for traumatized refugees in Germany, female victims of prosecution, asylum issues, and psychotherapy in an intercultural context.

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This text was translated from German into English after Angelika's unexpected death on June 7, 2004 by her long time companion, Dinu C. Gherman. He has also set up a website in her memory (see address below).

E-Mail: dinu@mac.com

URL: <http://www.angelika-birck.info/>

Citation

Birck, Angelika (2005). Laura Gets Her PhD. A Satire in Seven Acts [289 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 4(2), Art. 17, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0302171>.