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UNPLUGGED

Anti-editorial – Living the PhD Journey… The Life of Pi

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As the director of a doctoral programme in business administration, I sometimes wonder if I do anything but reproduce or even accelerate the shitshow. The PhD is a liminal space where learning prepares a student's transition to an academic role. However, we have collectively naturalised a set of institutional pressures, as if the typical experiences an academic will go through during his or her career were to be considered normal. We kindly and elegantly say that there are 'codes' or 'tricks of the trade' or 'routines' to be learnt – rites of passage. Academic language, when used to collectively narrate ourselves, is coupled with muted violence. Thus, it seems to be desirable to internalise certain socially accepted practices to avoid a shock upon entering academic life, between natural selection and an evolutionary approach. As Pi related his adventures, we theorise the doctoral journey to make it bearable by reinterpreting its trials, cultivating a 'sufferer' vision of the thesis.

The thesis beyond the academic test, as a moment of life, provides anaesthesia for the pain to come. Heroism has the advantage of confining the thesis to an extraordinary space, and by placing it out of ordinary life, we accept practices that elsewhere would be considered questionable. These practices escape common decency and create situations of unacceptable mental suffering. This confinement outside ordinary life also allows the continuous play on the tension or lack of boundaries between personal and professional life. Being pregnant, taking holidays, being a doctoral student after having had a professional career, settling one's migratory situation, eating … All these situations, with their various associated challenges, take an uncontrollable dimension because we have collectively put in place institutional arrangements that allow all (and any) overflows, that our discourse maintains in order to make life acceptable. It follows that what we call identity work today is simply overwork and weariness, putting students at risk: just read the numerous documented studies on student suffering … even if that – of course – only concerns *other* universities.

Giving back its true extraordinary meaning to the doctoral journey means putting exploration back at the heart of the project. For that, we must allow everyone to cultivate their ordinary life. Such naivety, some will say. This is nothing new to the realm of academic capitalism. It is nevertheless interesting that we ask organisations to pay more attention to our research and that we repeat questionable evidence-based management mantras, while our daily practices, at the heart of institutions' transformation, are the opposite of what we preach from the comfort of our observer's role. Giving voice to the doctoral students who live this life on a daily basis, letting them out of this *bourgeoisly* inflicted silence, would be a very modest first step. We do not have to tell ourselves stories like "The Life of Pi".

I sincerely thank the authors and authoresses of this special Unplugged who accepted to share their experiences, analyses, emotions and joys with us.

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Managing a PhD: An ethnographic Journey

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Officially, my PhD story began 4 days before Christmas in 2012 when I received a letter confirming that my proposal on municipal waste management had been accepted in the Swinburne University Postgraduate Research Award programme. But perhaps my journey had already started when Dr Teresa Savage, who taught me Japanese grammar and history when I was an undergraduate, kindly invited me to write an honours thesis about how Japan and Australia could work together to aid developing countries. I had no idea that writing and researching could be my 'thing'. But maybe I am wrong again. Maybe I was destined to be a thinker long before that. Thanks to a dead-end retail job (I was selling watches at a high-end boutique for several years), it gave me plenty of time to ponder life. Whatever the starting point was, it eventually led me to pursue a PhD – a journey full of surprises.

At my very first supervisory meeting, my principal supervisor, Dr Rowan Bedggood (whom I met during my honours year), asked what I was curious about. She wanted to make sure that I didn't just 'land on' a topic that made sense at the time. If I must be honest, waste management sounded significant in a research proposal, and I was desperate to get my foot in the door. But if I was given a second chance to pick, I would probably choose something very different. And I told her exactly that. For instance, a presentation given by Dr Grant Walton about how corruption was perceived in Papua New Guinea (PNG) struck me profoundly. I had found it the most fascinating topic at the International Development Conference in New Zealand, which I had attended in the previous year. Wouldn't it be exciting to research something like that? It was almost like investigative journalism. Perhaps I could investigate human trafficking, or doctors receiving 'red pockets' in China before performing surgeries, or even ghost-writers being recruited to do student assignments.[1] So, by the end of that conversation, my thesis topic had changed from 'Waste Management, Corporate Social Responsibility and Obsolescence through Public-Private Partnerships' to 'I don't exactly know what I want to research, but I am curious about corruption'.

Then, I met up with my supervisors almost weekly to discuss my research project. I also kept myself busy by attending induction sessions, seminars and workshops. While I enjoyed my new freedom and identity, I soon realised that finding a social phenomenon interesting and having to write a 100,000 word thesis on it were two very different things. I was still unclear about what my research project was. Though, for the purpose of brainstorming, I noted down everything about corruption I could think of. I tried to recall stories from friends and families and browsed through media resources. I downloaded hundreds of academic journal articles in the hope that I would find the overlooked niche that would miraculously transform my life as an aspiring scholar.

At this point, I also thought it would be a great idea to informally document my PhD journey in the form of a journal. In the first entry, dated 23 April 2013, I wrote:

> …I was in a workshop last week and learned about the importance of warming up when writing. So, I have decided I should do this. This morning I've started [writing] before 8am. I've decided to drive in so that I can leave a little later in the evening (otherwise it would get really late to catch the train home) … By the way, no one will be reading these entries apart from me. This will serve a good way to keep track of what I have been up to and a record of my (rather slow) progress.

I had heard many stories about how pursuing a PhD can be a lonely endeavour; therefore, right from the beginning, I knew that I had to do something different. I approached a couple of fellow newbies and suggested that we should form a mini study group. The idea was that if we met up regularly, we could push each other to write, critique each other's work and be productive together. They were keen to partake. We soon recruited two more colleagues, and that was the birth of my support group. I am forever grateful for their collegiality. The five of us (Dr Vassilissa Carangio, Dr Alison Herron, Ferial Farook and Noor Mohamad) later presented our initiative at the biannual Living Research Conference at Swinburne University to encourage other PhD students to

[1] 'Red pocket' is a traditional Chinese way of money-gifting where the money is placed inside a pocket-size red envelope.

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follow suit. The excerpt below is taken from our presentation abstract:

> …[W]e also became sounding boards and audiences for practising presentations, and shared the joys of milestones reached and attempted to collectively solve obstacles along the way. To celebrate this special collegiality and developing friendship, we named our little community 'SWINspire', which encapsulates the group's evolved physical and symbolic essences to Support, Write and Inspire.

Indeed, SWINspire helped me enormously on both a personal and professional level throughout my PhD life. For example, when I participated in the Three-Minute Thesis (3MT) competition, I had to present my research topic to a large group of people. I had done public speaking before, but 3MT was on a completely different level, and I felt extremely vulnerable. How could I convince others of the significance of my research when I barely knew what I was doing? After all, I was only a few months into my candidature. But my principal supervisor and fellow SWINspire members devoted their precious time for me to practise and fine-tune my narrative. In the end, I came in second at the university final and won $1,000 in prize money. It was a glorious moment in my PhD life.

You see, while the first year of my candidature was dominated by uncertainty, I was enthusiastic about my PhD in general. I became even more passionate about my research project after attending a writing retreat in Queenscliff facilitated by Prof. Ron Adams in late 2013. At this retreat, I met other PhD candidates from various universities and disciplines across Australia. I also learned about the 'performance' of writing. For one of the exercises at the retreat, we had to describe our PhD journey using a metaphor. This is what I wrote:

> The course of my PhD is like the weather pattern in Melbourne: every day has four seasons. Always unpredictable – one minute sunny, the next minute gloomy. It never rains when I have my umbrella, yet it pisses down when I go on a picnic. But I have learned to grab the chance when I can, have a beer when it's clear, and have a hot chocolate when it hails. If I get caught in the rain, I dance and enjoy the moment.

After the writing retreat ended, I got involved in another writing group with colleagues at the Faculty of Business and Law. We would take turns to book empty classrooms to write. I took this self-imposed commitment very seriously, and I even promised the Facebook world that I would not shy away from this hell of a marathon:

> Words are not dead; they continue to live through interpretations of the readers. They bring out emotions, provoke feelings, paint imaginations, and leave footprints, lingering in your heart. I have learned so much about what a writer can achieve. At the very least, I should try my best to engage the audience. To do so, I will need to let go; and let my words dance. Come, dance with me!

Dancing or not, I was certain of one thing – I wanted to see the end of my PhD. By then, the context of my thesis also became clearer. I essentially wanted to explore how social media could be used to mobilise bystanders to help victims of corruption. My thesis would focus on three case studies – the first case was about a young man who died mysteriously at an underground subway in China, and his mother tried to seek justice from the state-owned subway company; the second case was also in China, about how an activist got targeted after raising awareness about an incident where several primary school children were molested; and the last case was about a victim who continued to suffer at the hands of a powerful tycoon with Yakuza connections in Japan. My research project mainly dealt with qualitative social media data, but I was unsure how the cases could be presented in my thesis:

> The more I look into the data, the more I want to present these stories in a compelling way. Although none of these incidents were new and previously unreported, I feel like I am in a unique position as a researcher and thus have an obligation to tell the world what really happened to these brave people who stood up against corruption. I thought about using narratives to write these chapters, so I began developing dialogues in my head, standing in their shoes, trying to imagine that I am them. And this is what I think got to me eventually. Switching between individuals who lost hope, I know I cannot save them, but should I just accept that it is the case? I cannot bring back someone's dead son, I cannot protect a family facing eviction, and I cannot change the judge's decision to dismiss a case against a powerful stalker. What happens to these people are not up to me, but what happened to them can perhaps be portrayed by me. Can I write about their stories in a powerful way? If 'writing is becoming' (Noy, 2003), then I hope to become a stronger person through my writing.

Despite my strong will to tell the world about these cases, writing slowly became labour. Concurrently, I taught several undergraduate business subjects, so I had legitimate reasons to avoid my thesis. But even when I was not working, I found it hard to concentrate. Sometimes I would stare at my computer screen for ages and not produce any writing:

> At the moment I'm stuck… I have some ideas about what to write, but then when I need to write things down, I become mute…

> …I started to look at power from a different angle. I have gone through consumer power and found the different streams of power literature. Then I came across the Foucault wall – this was the first low point I've experience during my PhD journey so far; it was also the first time that a dead person drove me crazy. I have attempted to read a few of his papers about power and its association with knowledge which is what I found applicable in the case of my research. But I quickly gave up because it was like he wrote in another language. So I've decided to read about a paper which Foucault himself wrote in order to explain his own work as a reflection before I go on further, hoping to be enlightened with

> his help. I was even more confused [than before]. My world was turned up-side-down, I started to question everything. According to Foucault, we need to understand the opposite before we can understand the immediate. Say, in order to understand sanity, we first need to understand insanity, and to understand power, we need to understand resistance to power. Similarly, to understand knowledge, which is something we know, we will first need to define what we don't know. But how do we know what we don't know when we don't know?

Then life got in the way and my PhD was abruptly pushed aside. The year 2015 was a year of disruption for me in many ways. Some major life events during this time include ending a long-term relationship, selling a property, moving back to my parents' home and having a car accident. I found it increasingly difficult to look at my thesis. Procrastination was my only agenda. I started blogging and wrote about random things. For example, I did a piece on the social construction of the 'friend-zone' and developed a five-level conceptual model for this peculiar phenomenon. I fantasised about ditching my PhD, going to Japan to have a solo wedding, becoming a gravia model and living happily ever after on sushi and ramen in a match-box apartment somewhere in Shibuya. I really wish I had the courage to walk away from it all. What happened instead was relatively tame: I enrolled myself in a local drama class (only to realise that I can't act), got several tattoos (including one when I was drunk) and shaved my head (people in the PhD office thought I was terminally ill).

By the end of 2016, my newly grown hair experienced shades of blonde, pink, green, blue, silver, purple and eventually back to black. I started wearing prescription glasses. I converted to minimalism. I sold and donated most of my belongings. Emotionally, I became more stable. I also started a new relationship. I tried to reconnect with my thesis, but it was still out of whack. And if I was not writing, I would be thinking about the fact that I was not writing. My plans to submit my thesis evaporated; I desperately needed a new hobby to distract myself from being overwhelmed by frustration and shame. So, I bought a ukulele. I didn't think learning a new musical instrument at 33 was possible. But even my songs could not escape the phantom claws of my PhD. The very first song I wrote is called *I have a THESIS to write*, which pretty much summed up my life back then. It went like this:

> Today is a Monday, and I have a thesis to write.
> Today is a Tuesday, and I have a thesis to write.
> Today is a Wednesday, and I have a thesis to write.
> Today is a Thursday, and I have a thesis to write.
> Today is a Friday, and I have a thesis to write.
> Today is a Saturday, and I have a thesis to write.
> Today is a Sunday, and I have a thesis to write.
> Tomorrow is a Monday, and I still have a thesis to write.

I created a YouTube channel using the same name as my blog – 'Barbie and Trolls' – and I uploaded my song.[2] A friend complained that it was a bit 'repetitive' – but that was exactly my point. Every day, I wished I was doing something different, something new, something easier. Then one day, it suddenly clicked, and I did exactly what I wished for. The epiphany was that my creative outbursts should no longer be ignored. Instead of beating myself up for not progressing with my thesis, I started to embrace creating *other* things. I allowed myself to draw again. This was something I had stopped doing since I was 17. I experimented with different media including *sumi* (Japanese ink), watercolour and pencil. I even held an art exhibition at a local commercial gallery, showcasing 14 pieces of my *sumi* work.[3] To my surprise, my creative pursuits did not derail me further from completing my thesis. On the contrary, they helped me regain focus and self-confidence. In the end, I even decided to include some of my artwork in my thesis at the beginning of the chapters for all three case studies.

But just as I thought my PhD was getting back on track, the drama of my life escalated. My father went missing for 9 months. During this time, my younger sister was also diagnosed with a rare small-nerve disease that had resemblances to Guillain–Barré syndrome (GBS). For the first time in my candidature, my thesis was not the hardest thing I had to deal with. In fact, I would much rather be dealing with my thesis than anything else at that point. Since writing was the *only* thing I could do, I kept going. I developed a routine. I partnered up with several study-buddies. I gave myself deadlines. I pushed on until my goals and milestones were met.

Finally, I submitted my thesis in November 2017. But even that was not the end of it. Waiting for my examiners' feedback was just as tough, and my brain started to eat itself:

> Day 82 after submitting my thesis.
> No news yet.
> Feeling pretty empty.
> I have no purpose.
> I don't know what I'm doing with my life.
> I started to have doubts.
> Doubting myself, my ability, my relationships, my life.
> What am I doing?
> How did I get here?
> Where should I go from now?
> I need to have a new project and a new identity.
> But I can't seem to move forward.
> I'm paralysed while drowning in my own fear.

Luckily, the examiners' reports arrived before I had another meltdown. All I needed to do were minor revisions (to my

2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtsZ-fgzhK8.
3. http://www.tacitart.com.au/Tacit%20Archives/Archive201017/TCA%20Exhibitions%202017/entangled.html.

supervisor's satisfaction) and then I would be able to put 'Dr' next to my name. But for some reason, I could not bring myself to do those final corrections. For almost 5 years, I constantly imagined what my life would be like after I had submitted my thesis. But when I finally had the chance to put it behind me, I was suddenly terrified to let it go. I felt very conflicted and the idea of 'finishing my thesis' pained me so much. After another 3 agonising months, I managed to address all the points raised by the examiners (the actual work only took about a week) and resubmitted.

I graduated in 2018. My dad eventually reunited with my family and he was able to attend my graduation ceremony. My sister, however, is still yet to recover from her illness. At the time of drafting this article, I just landed a full-time role as a research analyst for a not-for-profit organisation. On the creative side, I still sing silly songs with my ukulele, but I rarely share with the world through my YouTube channel. I am learning to draw digitally in my spare time, and I have plans to set up an Etsy store selling cat stickers (some of my digital artwork can be found on Instagram.[4] Sometimes when I look back, the PhD feels like a dream. So, is it possible to manage a PhD? The short answer is yes – you just need to keep going.

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[4] @peibydesign.

On the PhD Journey: Its Past and Future

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Vulnerability is part of the human experience, as uncomfortable as it can be. Why am I making myself vulnerable in this essay? My desire is for other PhD students to know that what they go through is normal (or at least felt by others), and for future students to enter this journey being more aware of its struggles.

Along my PhD journey, I heard a few professors say how their PhD time had been like living a dream life, and how they were somewhat missing this 'liberty'. But a dream life it is not, for many of us, most of the time.

Undertaking a PhD has been the best decision I've taken in my life, although it has not been an easy road. Here is a part of my story.

This text is an attempt to reflect on the past and future of the intense journey that is called the PhD. It is a kind of sense-making exercise: retrospectively reflecting on it and seeking order and meaning.

My thesis is about time and temporality, which are, in my opinion, amongst the most essential topics underlying most of human experience. Time and temporality have not only been the focus of my research, but they played an important role in how I experienced the PhD journey. Accordingly, I will present this essay by introducing the stages of the PhD: before, during and what is to come.

Before the PhD

Earlier in life, most of my decisions were based on opportunities which were within reach, avoiding competition.

When choosing the field for my undergraduate studies, I was tempted to study journalism, but it was difficult to get into, and even more difficult to secure a job afterwards. The profession was starting to experience difficulties, and I was afraid of the outcome; therefore, I went into communications studies (a bachelor's degree with specialisation in media and culture industries) – a field I was nonetheless passionate about and that seemed more promising career-wise.

And then I realised, as well, that there was a lot of competition to get the jobs in this trendy field. "You'll have to start as an assistant for a few years and then climb the ladder", many teachers told us. Well, I did not decide to go to university only to find a position that I was not truly interested in afterwards. And the idea of endless unpaid internships and fighting for a job did not enchant me.

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So I did a master's degree in project management, since I had realised through the years that more important than the content of the project itself was the project as a mode of organising, and that the people with whom I worked were really important to me.

I finished my master's degree and worked in the project management field, holding different positions in diverse industries. I was learning a lot, and it was nice, but this was not it.

You know what I mean? 'It', as in something that wakes you up with excitement in the morning, making you eager to work on what thrills you; something you love, and in which you excel.

I took time to reflect on my life. What do I really like, and what am I good at?

I already knew I would want to do a PhD one day, if only as a personal challenge. I'm the first in my family to even go to university. I was raised by a single mother in a more than modest context and did not know then that, statistically, where I came from did not destine me to a bright future. I realised, only while doing my master's degree, how privileged most people pursuing higher education really were. I told myself, 'One day I'll prove the statistics wrong and do a PhD, just to show that nobody is "destined to get the short end of the stick"'.

I was expecting to work for a while and to do my PhD later on, to pursue academia as a second career. And then I ran into one of my master's professors at a professional event. We were chatting about our field, and she looked at me and told me, "Julie, you must really do your PhD".

Serendipity. The idea grew in my head, and I realised that this was it: I was made to be a professor. Now. Not after 20 years in a career not made for me. I was passionate about pedagogy. I had the perfect balance of analytical skills and practical grounds. I needed autonomy, diversity and intellectual challenges. I was made for that career, and that career was made for me.

I didn't even do a master's thesis, since my master's degree was not research oriented. I enrolled in a methodology class and prepared for the test required for admission into the PhD programme, while still working full time. I was on a crazy schedule, rising before dawn to study for my class before going to work. Despite these crazy hours, I was feeling more energised than ever, excited about the future. I got accepted to the PhD programme and left my job. It was the beginning of a 5-year (or so) adventure.

For the first time in my life, I decided to do something despite the competition. I knew most people did not finish their PhD, and that amongst the ones who finished, most did not get an academic position. But I felt at peace anyway, at least at first. (I do admit to have been overwhelmed with anxiety by the end of my PhD – I will elaborate more on that soon.) I knew I was doing the right thing, despite not being especially confident in myself in general. I had the strong belief that no matter how few people succeeded in getting an academic position, I would be part of them.

The PhD roller coaster

During the PhD, I felt I was on the right path. I liked every dimension that a professor must pursue: teaching, research and services to the community. I had the opportunity to teach my first classes then, and I enjoyed it as much as I expected. I was passionate about my researches, which provided me with a strong purpose. I was implicated in many initiatives and enjoyed contributing to my community. Really, it was (still is) the dream job for me.

I did promise you to 'elaborate' on the darkest time in my PhD. Well, I realised that anxiety and depression being very high amongst PhD students was definitively not a myth. I experienced an intense amount of anxiety through this PhD. It was enough to make me read the whole *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) (whose ontology is far from mine) used by psychologists to diagnose mental health issues. I felt I had so many of those issues. (Actually not, but I recognised myself in many symptoms of many issues, which is apparently a normal thing when you read it, unless you're a psychopath.)

The PhD experience has been a roller coaster, bringing me excitement and fulfilment, but also despair. I often had the thought that, had I known, I would never have done it. And all this while having the two most wonderful supervisors – inspiring, generous and supportive, and having secured financial support through grants. I cannot even imagine the nightmare other less fortunate ones are going through.

The end of the PhD was especially excruciating, since I had then a full-time job and was also teaching, while still finishing my PhD in the early mornings and weekends. Five years is a long time, and I was dying to put an end to that adventure. I had had enough. I don't even know how I made it through to the end. The day before I submitted my thesis, I broke down in tears on the sidewalk while talking on the phone with one of my (still very supportive) supervisors. I'm not even sure I could have gone one more day without completely breaking down (I was definitely not far).

I was not as relieved as I had hoped after my submission. After all, I still had a full-time job, classes to teach, a bunch of marking to do and other deadlines I had pushed forward – still too much for one person. My weekends were far from free, and I had to catch up on sleep and rest (which my schedule would not allow, before what seemed like a long time). I felt kind of empty inside, and still stressed out. The treadmill was still too fast, and nothing could make it stop. (But don't worry… this essay has a happy ending.)

I know that it can be hard to bounce back when you make it to the bottom. Although I have been spared so far, my readings on well-being and burnout are making me cautious and concerned. I think I've been very close to that bottom. I could see it, but I stopped just before crashing. I promise myself to take better care in the future. It will be a challenge, since academia is so demanding and reinforces that you can always do more. The funny thing is that my research interests include work intensification, overwork and work–life tensions and paradoxes. It's no wonder why.

An especially interesting issue for academics is the autonomy paradox: the more autonomy you have, the more hours you work, ending up controlled anyway (Putnam, Myers, & Gaillard, 2014). Academia is so prone to that paradox!

Overwork is all around in academia. And it all starts at the PhD, a particularly precarious situation – so little openings, so many brilliant candidates… you can always do more, it's never enough.

"Don't fall into the comparison game", one of my supervisors wisely told me. I had to repeat this to myself so many times. I often felt that everyone around me had more publications (which was not hard to beat, since I had none until recently). But my journey has been distinct and interesting for its own reasons, I guess: I started a business, did a lot of academic and practitioners' conferences, taught a few different classes, did my PhD within a reasonable timeframe, etc. Others, having many publications but maybe fewer outside activities, have probably fallen into comparison games with me. How many times did I have conversations like:

- Another PhD candidate: How can you do everything you're doing?! How productive you are!
- Me: Well, I have no publications so far, and you've got [x]! Isn't that most important if we want to land an academic position? Stop comparing! (And neither should I)

You always emphasise what you didn't achieve, instead of what you did. After submitting my thesis while working full time and teaching, I had two other papers to submit for special issues. My proposals had been accepted, so I could not consider missing these opportunities, even if I had no more time and energy at that point. However, instead of celebrating what I had achieved so far (which was considerable), I was upset with myself at the idea of not being able to get everything done.

This is something I want to change from now on: acknowledging what I achieve, and not only where I fall short, or what the end results will be. There is so much invisible work in that career, so much effort behind a single published paper. We need to be proud of ourselves all along the way for doing difficult and meaningful work.

The dark side of academia (overwork, guilt and anxiety) may ruin the bright side of a career (purpose, accomplishment and excitement), which can be so fulfilling if you don't end up completely burnt out.

So the real relief actually came after the defence, when it was clear and official that I had made it through. Because I was unsure until I got the official news, meaning was dependent on the outcome. I felt, as with tests: How did it go? "Well, I'll tell you how it went when I see my mark".

The PhD is over now. I feel like the luckiest person on earth, since I already had a position as a professor even before my defence. I was right to do it. I made it. I landed the most fulfilling job in the world. I will get to work with brilliant people, do research that will help organisations and people, and teach the next generation of leaders. Call me naive, if you like, but I think it is one of the most fundamental roles you can have if you want to change the world.

The PhD experience has taught me many things – as much about how to be a researcher as about more personal matters. It is quite a challenge. It puts you in situations where you really have to work on yourself and show resilience.

Sometimes you have to be strategic and follow opportunities, but sometimes, despite challenges, you have to follow your dreams. I did the former all my life, and finally the latter when I decided to do my PhD. Knowing the end result, of course, I have no regrets. I now look forward to and feel excited for the future. Really meaningful journeys are difficult, but worth it all.

How time affected my experience

Weick (1995) mentions that delays bring negative emotions. We are told that a PhD should take 4 years[5] (which very few students doing qualitative research accomplish). But that creates an expectation and a goal. My interest regarding time is not innocent. I have always noticed the impact of deadlines, timeframes and delays on people, but, most of all on me. The timescale of the PhD often stretches. You can't rely on a linear and predictable paradigm. Things unfold in their own way. Reflection requires time.

But I was secretly (or not) hoping to reach that 4-year target, which I was even hoping would be the very maximum, since doctoral scholarships are allocated for 3 years. What comes after is a struggle between other paid commitments and finding time for research (you now know how this struggle felt for me). I was even pushing for more: I would turn 30 years old 4 years after having started the PhD. How awesome it would be to finish before! – a totally arbitrary goal.

5. Four years is the expected duration of the PhD in administration in Canada. It includes more than 1 year of coursework, a synthesis exam, a thesis proposal and the research work.

How time is related to meaning and how meaning is built around time!

Every delay along the way (administrative or otherwise) has been lived as a true challenge. I could see how all these micro delays were putting this overall goal at risk. At some point it became clear that I would not be done in 4 years. I was comforting myself by saying it was ok, since I took an 8-month break (to focus on growing the business I co-founded a few years before – another thrilling but nerve-wracking story adding to the PhD journey). I thought: If I make it in 4 years and 8 months, it will kind of be the same as 4 years (I will be in my thirties though, but well, who cares after all?).

But then that 'new goal' also slipped away. Like a mirage, an oasis in the desert, I felt the end was always moving away. I panicked a bit before my 5-year milestone, but it seemed so close now! Closer than ever! I stayed hopeful and continued my walk in the desert towards the mirage.

And this was it. 64 months in, I submitted my thesis.

Most of the people around me (outside of academia) had been constantly asking me if I'd be done soon, even from the very beginning. (I guess the word that we should never ask a PhD student if he/she will be done soon has still not spread enough. I hope you are taking note.) I think that by the end, my irritation was obvious when I tried to explain to them that a PhD is not a 6-month endeavour. I almost threw myself into the arms of the few persons I met afterwards who told me "Wow, this was fast" when I mentioned getting it done in 5 years, or so. Yes, it was (relatively) fast (for social science and qualitative studies), thank you, finally! How weird it was to find that it was 'fast', though it felt so slow.

I guess that those delays are harder for time-urgent individuals, having a preoccupation with the passage of time, deadlines, and the rate that tasks must be performed (Mohammed & Harrison, 2013). Time-urgent individuals are "chronically hurried, trying to fulfill all of their ambitions and commitments under deadlines situations that they have often created" (Waller, Conte, Gibson, & Carpenter, 2001, p. 589). Well, this is me (and I am not so alone in academia, am I?): committing to so much, and struggling to get everything done on time.

Time urgency is regarded as a stable individual difference, but I'm working on myself to be more flexible with time. Because academia is filled with expanding delays and long timeframes, I need (and am getting) to be more comfortable with all this.

After the PhD (future perfect thinking)

Seeking order, clarity and rationality is an important goal of sense-making (Weick, 1995). These three have been lacking so much throughout my PhD. This essay gives an overview of what the sense-making process has been for me. But given that sense-making is a process, it is continuous and never stops.

According to Weick (1995), we make sense of the future by thinking retrospectively about it, which corresponds to future perfect thinking. Even when thinking about the future, we imagine it as being in the past.

My PhD has set me on what will be a long and fulfilling academic career. I will work on fascinating topics, contribute to build knowledge around organisations, teach students with a never-fading passion, collaborate with brilliant colleagues and contribute to academic life in many ways. I can see it as if it were already past. I know struggles will be real, as well, but at least the PhD experience gives us part of the means to continue on this journey.

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M@n@gement

Of Implosions and Blossoming: A Doctoral Journey

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A colleague once confided in us that the doctoral journey was like a painful birth for her. I must admit that this image, cloaked in suffering, haunted me. As it turned out, this colleague predicted the character of my own doctoral experience, an experience that was half discovery and half existential questioning. Germain and Taskin (2017) suggest that the doctoral journey is a confrontation. In my view, it is the confrontation with oneself, as well as a dialogue between oneself and the world. The human spirit is the seat of all uncertainty; the individual internalises the tensions of the world, believing these tensions to be their own, and subsequently seeks to escape them without even questioning the reason for the presence of these tensions in their thoughts. Confronted by their own choices and trapped by the productions of a vulnerable intellect, exposed to the regard of others in the most intimate yet public ways, the researcher may succumb to doubt and inhibition, and – ensnared in the ordeal that perplexed even Sartre – silently begin to consider the possibility that 'Hell is the Other Me'.

At the origin …

At the origin of the researcher's universe, a momentary implosion occurs. The challenge faced by the doctoral student is to be able to discover their own developmental trajectory by asking this question: Is the doctoral journey primarily the discovery of self?

During doctoral research and the ocean of questions that this experience raises, serendipitous opportunities await for the researcher to meet this Other self, the one who doesn't ask to be revealed.

The doctoral student's choice of thesis subject is never simply the result of happy chance. Conversely, determining one's research objective is not a directed effort as much as an occasionally hesitant outline of potential ways to subjectively express one's intimate thoughts.

Indeed, it is in questioning one's subject and in abandoning any attempt of a better reconstruction that one manages to embrace its potential to be *behind what* can be discovered and grasped by the researcher.

To write: To reveal the traits of oneself

Writing is the activity at the heart of that into which the subjectivity of the researcher is invited. Writing qualifies the researcher (Germain & Taskin, 2017), but it is also indicative of an omnipresent subjectivity that tends to be experienced in multiple forms. Our own awareness, in fact, leads us to analyse in one mode rather than another, to prefer some ways of reading over others, or simply to question one aspect of a hugely polymorphous reality – this subjectivity, in turn, is interpreted as the manoeuvrability of the doctoral student.

Sometimes lost in this world of perception, the researcher will, nevertheless, be confident to state that traits of their subjectivity may be recognised and admitted by the scientific community. However, they will not be less constrained to justify their analytical choices, one by one, in the section reserved to exposing the *limits* of their contribution, alternately invoking Chronos and Argos.

But subjectivity betrays oneself, or is rather translated in formulae enshrouded by self and crystallised in writing. This translation is often associated with a writer's individual style, but it harbours more than what others tend to grasp or even wish to allow. It betrays, in fact, the ways of thinking that are at the origin of what I like to call the *traits of self.* Often, the reason and form of bursts of expressive passion are reduced to the sum of intellectual efforts and mere hints of individuality. Yet, these traits of the researcher will have been preceded by a moment of blossoming which reveals 'that' which precedes it.

In fact, prior to becoming a researcher, the doctoral student will have experienced a doctoral journey. Implicit in this experience, one can believe in a training of another type, a type that

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designs perspectives as fundamental *to* and *for* the research of *self*.

During this intellectual voyage, which is already intense and fed by the need to acquire multiplicity of knowledge (Raymond, 2018), the researcher is connected and is immersed in a deep, subliminal exploration, which readies their heart for this moment of blossoming, co-constructed by the perspectives and presence of Others, each one reading the researcher's drafts. Among them, we will find the thesis director.

To be judged: The perspective of others as a part of me

A condition really exists in this journey through the wrongly called 'well-known' land of self: that condition of openness to be shaped within the research process. The words of Germain and Taskin (2017) have seduced me in this regard. I wish, from the perspective of the researcher, to reflect on these words. To be formed *within* the research is to rethink the nature of the doctoral journey and to extend its borders. In other words, it is to give in to humility and, thus, avoid the pretence that one can enter into the borders of the self from a single perspective. There is an implicit promise in this process: firstly, for the thesis director, that of transcending the role of evaluator; then, for the researcher, making the doctoral journey a life path during the course of which they learn to be challenged and not simply be 'supervised'. This passage is not systematic. It is based on the researcher's own will to recognise that their thesis director is not just an assessor-evaluator, a role to which they are often limited because of hierarchical positions in some of our institutions.

In fact, among roles occupied simultaneously by the thesis director, a distant guide hides behind the figure of 'verifier', 'corrector', 'reader' and 'adviser' to which the researcher sometimes reduces the director. Does this seem paradoxical? The fervent researcher will denounce the utilitarian roles that characterise society's approved management techniques, without perhaps glimpsing that behind these figures someone else is hidden who reads our work and challenges us in each of our drafts.

To be challenged: this is also a question. The guide questions the researcher's choices and leaves no place for unanswered questions. Although the latter's human spirit has already allowed them to find a myriad of confrontations and contradictions within, the researcher will be born, most of the time, from what others reveal in them.

In other words, the researcher who chooses to recognise an invitation to an *inner* journey will seek a plural where only a singular was glimpsed before.

Make no mistake about it: sometimes the process may be violent. In fact, some of these multiple paths create fear because they involve a reassessment – or perhaps simply because each path is one step closer to the light of what we conceal within us, hidden behind the moments of doubt. Perhaps the expression frightens as does its experience, but the scientific research allows the structuring of this journey of the self by re-inviting relevance to the choices that one makes as a researcher. I experienced this invitation, and I chose to see invitations in every single question. This choice is not innate; it is more so the result of the attention given to it, nonetheless equally inspired by the Other's view, that makes this experience a *lived* journey more than just *thought*. The doctoral journey can, in fact, be limited by frustration, as the journey might not make sense until the end. Each intermediate step is a production endured by means of a symbolic suffering.

The intimacy of reflection

To be a doctoral student is to listen to this world that is in us and that whispers a story to us. One must be ready to navigate this return towards the self by humbly accepting to be *shown* as much as *seen* clearly from the perspective of others – to discover in the thesis director someone who can help the researcher to read within while being without. This also requires an intimate revelation of the researcher's thoughts when sharing an idea or a perspective. In my view, this feature of the process is left unsaid in today's doctoral experience. As long as the doctoral pathway remains defined as the voyage of the *aspiring* researcher, the process will only trace a semblance of the individual's experience, too narrow to take account of tensions and intra-personal conflicts that the researcher must learn to transcend. In order to properly acknowledge the recurring features of this complex path, I believe it is necessary to reveal the implicit expectation that feeds the researcher: that of being questioned in their drafts, within a pathway, but by an Other who detaches them from what Tisseron (2011) would call *'rear' logic*, according to which the Other is present only to evaluate the researcher's value. The researcher instead seeks to meet a supervisor-guide who will question the student towards the possible, that which will allow the researcher's inner life to resonate within their broader reality that is much wider than just the world of research.

During my doctoral pathway, I have encountered mentors, and from experience I know that I would not have been able to write my thesis with one of them. Certainly, the *guide* inspires as much as a mentor, but the latter also fascinates people. The mentor is the eternal inaccessible lodged in the light of the unreachable. Between the researcher and the mentor, a barrier exists. There are echelons to climb and a hoped-for, fantasised future that one can, at most, glide over. The mentor will never plunge into the depths of the researcher's inner reflections. Therefore, from this somewhat monodirectional relationship frustration can sometimes enter the research formed

around this mentor, who aspires that people become what they will never be.

But what then about the guide-supervisor? To be supported consists not merely of a gift from the Other: such a perspective could place the doctoral student in a state of perpetual expectation and great vulnerability. No, to be supported involves, primarily, a choice on the researcher's part: to dare to be detached from one viewpoint in order to blossom in the world that surrounds us, to dare to be open to the plural, a place not often reached because of the pervasiveness of the singular. It is, in this way, a joining in a rhythmic relationship by consideration of what this Other supports us in.

To explore and the singular becoming plural

The *in research* that Germain and Taskin (2017) translate grammatically by an encompassing *by* is, undoubtedly, the deepest form of immersion that a researcher can know. It is the space at the heart of which the researcher accepts abandonment for another start. It is, in fact, from the *in* that the possibility of little *by*'s is born. The *in* is the space of departure from which thoughts, as well as their expression, blossom. But the *by* itself changes through time and through discussions with others.

The *by* cannot be the through. It is, in fact, only *'one'* of the several forms of *through*. These *by*'s are different ways of thinking, *visible* because they are palpable to the mind and *actualised* through a form that is made aware and that will have sprouted in the *within*. In other words, the multiplicity of intense experiences is expressed in writing.

On account of trying to name everything with *by*, we wish to identify a form among others that makes sense of our personal experience: distance.

The history of humanity has taught us that temptation is born from the forbidden, and that from a temptation never fed arises frustration.

In contrast, I believe that maintaining this desire to be distant from the object of research is to better love this same object. In the typology offered by Germain and Taskin (2017), the figure of the 'explorer' supervisor is certainly open to this form of experimentation, but the exploration is reserved, nevertheless, to only being a *floating* exploration in comparison to the attempts at detachment initiated by the researcher. In other words, the researcher lends no credibility to detachment if it harbours the potential for evasive reflection that will lead, ultimately, to a dream world from which the researcher's thoughts will perhaps never return. The supporter-guide, on their part, can offer a pathway of return to the subject of research that the guide knows the doctoral student chose at the origin because it made sense to them.

This need for detachment is not, in fact, a 'moment of confusion'; as long as the detachment is supported, it will be experienced as an escape from the game of social and academic production expected of the researcher. If the thought that one renders to doctoral research is constructed and is structured with the passing days, the passion, on the other hand, is not to be controlled: it is to be harnessed and changed, to be sure, but to welcome it is to allow it the time to nurture us and thus lead us to embrace new forms of individuality. And so, to conduct research differently from what was anticipated and bring into it multidisciplinary approaches will make this voyage of writing a non-linear experience. By diving into philosophy and sociology, I have, for my part, expressed what I call *the intellectual polyamorous experience* I have gone through. Transparency in the expression of this experience has allowed me to reiterate to everyone that passion and desire in research are precious gifts that one has the right to enjoy. Distancing myself from what I had initially designed as the *conventional contours* of a specific thesis subject offered me the opportunity to make my work an interdisciplinary dialogue. This choice allowed me to acknowledge the vividness of non-time when the researcher finds much more than they ever lost.

To rediscover possible time…

My doctoral research started with a promise: to be listened to. It evolved in subsequent years to another promise: to learn to listen to myself. To understand this truth, it is necessary to delve into a rediscovery of time.

Thoughts are shared and paced by speech. But speech without exchange is only monologue suffocated by the absence of the Other. The doctoral students, too, need their words to find the space in which to be liberated, listened to and questioned through conversation. The 'Other' is in some ways the guardian of these beginnings, allowing researchers to escape the world of the neoliberal university – in which a process of injunction to production is sometimes imposed – in order to find the core of what makes sense to them and to renew with reason their desire to be researchers. In the self, the identity of 'researcher' is not fixed but draws from each form of authentic socialisation, far removed from duties and obligations.

A typology reread from the perspective of time

It is crucial to pay attention to time as it is allocated to conversations between the researcher and the supervisor. Indeed, when evoked as a grid for reading, time allows for diving into the core of the classifications of the roles of thesis directors and their position as researcher companion. Time mobilised here is the duality outlined by Bergson (Worms, 1997). We use it to reveal, from the perspective of the thesis director, *objective time* described as a universal reference. This allows us to infer

Table 1. Supervisors and their corresponding researchers: A new typology of relations through the perspective of time. Inspired from Germain and Taskin 2017, page 14, themselves inspired from Wright, Murray et Geale, 2007

Role as defined by Germain & Taskin, 2017	Function of objective time	Description of subjective time	Corresponding researcher
The quality controller	Time is constrained	Time has a limiting scope in the exploration of the fields of possibilities of intimacy of thought offered to researcher.	The official
The thesis director	Time is structuring	Time reminds of the finality of the nature of the commitment in the supervised doctoral journey.	The qualified
The trainer	Time is a cause	Time is the operating agent for future choices.	The competitor
The mentor	Time is material	Time is outliner of the object of research and appears in a defined space which takes shape in a temperate, transient time.	The copy
The explorer	Time is abstraction	Time is absent; thought creations take place in a symbolic dimension detached from the laws of physics.	The detached thinker
The guide (the supporter)	Time is revealing	Time has given in; it is detached, shared; it is changing, sometimes captured, sometimes embraced.	The passionate researcher

the subjective time subsequently internalised by the researcher. We return to the work of Germain and Taskin (2017), who propose a typology of the roles of thesis directors (Table 1 first column) – to which we have (1) added a new role (the guide), to offer our interpretation from the perspective of (2) time (providing our three new right-and corresponding columns).

To be liberated…from self

If a doctorate is the affair of only one subject of research, *the doctoral voyage* remains, for its part, the story of the blossoming of an identity of the assumed researcher. However, can a unique experience teach us everything? I do not believe so. If experience is a space, my personal conviction is that it is quite vast, allowing the inclusion of diverse passions, varied and sometimes opposing, that lead the researcher to find them. Linked intellectually to a research theme, the doctoral student can still unreservedly dive into a deep reflective questioning. Will the researcher have to, on behalf of the *solemn vow* of exclusivity made to a doctoral project, renounce the very passions that still stimulate this project?

My doctoral pathway has provided me with suggestive evidence. Another quest lies on the borders of research, embedded in the framework of a thesis: that of the sense of self. Behind the thirst for understanding the truth that one associates with a phenomenon, a pathway is outlined that affirms what the researcher is for the scientific community but that also includes what the researcher is ready to become. However, between *being* and *becoming*, the courage to dare to be the one that I want to be is hidden, and the *me* is inhabited by my intimate will.

How does the researcher escape the inherent questioning of their condition? The doctoral student cannot. However, the student has the power to discover in themselves a researcher formed by the research … by self. The supported doctoral student is not a protected one; they are not mollycoddled. The doctoral student is simply not alone when returning more deeply into themselves. The perspective of the Other and the multiple questionings that the Other awakens in us will sometimes make the difference.

If the doctoral student chooses to recognise an invitation to explore the edges of their research, this student will have learnt to read the world and the myriad of phenomena contained in a full and authentic view.

Isn't this, after all, the story of the researcher's subjectivity? Interlaced by humility, the present and the subjectivity that sometimes resonate together as a single fragile inner truth in the mind of a researcher are not orphaned. This truth is its own – its singularity, one of the parts of its individuality – the moment that the research is supported as a harmonious story of possible achievements. Doubt is no longer suffering but creation, which may have an implicit promise as a starting point. The Other will challenge perhaps each of our thoughts, but, ultimately, they will have listened with attention and consideration to each response given.

Certainly, the intellectual passion can be a fire that is extinguished in the silence of the smouldering. It can, however, also be the kindling that precedes the flame…

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Research Acceleration and Empirical Alienation: The Complicated Relationship between PhD Students and Their Field Studies

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Imagine finding yourself in an aseptic meeting room, facing the person you are interviewing for your PhD field research. It was a hard work getting this interview: you had to mobilise your network and identify contact persons, send emails and convince a manager to accept the idea of a researcher coming in and asking questions on company time. Once that groundwork was done, you had to send emails once again in order to schedule the interviews. And now you're finally here and the voice recorder is running. However, following the first 10 or 15 min of chitchat and icebreakers, the person in front of you – a she, let's say – isn't really engaging with your questions. Words still come out of her mouth, but they seem to originate from an annual report or a public relations website rather than a human brain. It isn't those words you are searching for. You're here to find out more about any contradictions and paradoxes inside this company. You start wondering. Should you ask more difficult questions? Should you probe more deeply and try to tease more information out of her and see what happens? What if she gets upset? After all, she was already nice enough to take some time out of her demanding job to help you do yours. What if, after this interview, the other employees won't talk to you anymore? What if you lose access to this company? Would you have the time and energy to find another company and still finish your PhD on time? Maybe you should just keep nodding along to the disembodied voice that comes out of this person's mouth. If you can't tease out any truly valuable information from this interview, you'll at least have an additional 60 min to add to your data set and flaunt in some abstract.

This train of thought has probably popped up at some point in the head of every PhD student in the field of management who is conducting qualitative research on primary data and who does not have a particular relationship with the organisation that he or she is studying, i.e. he or she is not a paid employee in a company or a volunteer in a Non Governmental Organization (NGO) etc.). These are difficult questions to field, as field research is of the utmost importance to the success of a PhD student. It is commonly accepted that empirical data are crucial components of a doctoral thesis, without which nothing is possible. One can always get by with a mediocre literature review or a dubious theoretical contribution; however, without solid empirical data, PhD students are bound to failure.

However, the time dedicated to PhD research is getting shorter. My university, for example, showed a 60% decline in students registering for their fifth or later year between 2012 and 2017; and as of 2019, it is quite out of the question to enrol for a sixth year. PhD students are also asked to take increasingly more responsibility upon themselves, to become managers of their own 'capital', such as their networking capabilities, workload capacity and, indeed, access to the field. This means that they, despite still being students, are progressively losing their right to make mistakes, as they have less and less time to correct them. In that context, they are increasingly made to feel responsible for these mistakes.

When individuals are asked to become more entrepreneurial in some aspect of their life – in other words, to be more competitive, motivated, autonomous and efficient, or, in short, more responsible – they will, in all likelihood, develop psychological dysfunctions (Ehrenberg, 1995). The mental health of PhD students is indeed starting to receive some attention in academia. The journal *Nature* dedicated not one but two editorials to the topic (*Nature*, 2019a, 2019b). The first international conference on the mental health and well-being of postgraduate researchers took place in Brighton, United Kingdom, in May 2019. It was a sold-out event. According to some Australian (Barry, Woods, Warnecke, Stirling, & Martin, 2018) and French studies (Haag et al., 2018), PhD students have higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress than the general population. Another study conducted in Flanders has shown that PhD students have a one-in-two chance of developing a mental health problem and a one-in-three chance of developing a psychiatric illness, such as depression. These odds are worse than those found to apply for the rest of the highly educated population and worse than those for professionals working in the defence sector or emergency services (Levecque, Anseel, Beuckelaer (de), van der Heyden, & Gisle, 2017). This is possibly to be expected since, from the very beginning of the PhD journey, we are inveigled to see our colleagues as competitors rather than as friends and to remember that we will be vying for the same positions in the not-so-distant future. In this way, we become suspicious instead of showing solidarity towards one another, which is

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unfortunate because it deprives us of a support structure within our own community.

In this article, I will argue that the acceleration and entrepreneurialisation of academia, in general, and PhD students, in particular, are detrimental not only to our well-being but also to the quality of our field research and the ways in which we approach and consider the field. This has consequences for positivist and critical scholars alike, although the latter may find themselves under even more pressure (Laudel & Gläser, 2008). The thoughts I share herein come mainly from my personal experiences during 3 years of PhD studies, complemented by a quick dive into the literature. I focus mainly on life as a PhD student under the French system, a system considered to be (for the time being) less unforgiving and uncompromising than the British, North American and German systems. Thus, what I have to say could probably resonate even more with the experiences of students from these other systems.

I will begin with a few thoughts on the rise of the PhD student as an entrepreneur of the self (Brown, 2015; Foucault, 2004), the acceleration of research and the alienation of researchers (Rosa, 2010). I will then comment on the consequences of these changes on fieldwork and on the quality of PhD research. I will conclude by providing a few pointers for the way forward.

The PhD student as an entrepreneur

Academics work under immense pressure to perform and are continuously subjected to the judgements of others (Bristow, Robinson, & Ratle, 2017; Knights & Clarke, 2014). This is even more true for PhD students: we find ourselves at a defining moment of our career in which we have no right to fail, very often with no back-up plan. As one director of a French business school describes in a blog piece entitled 'Please don't tell my parents I'm a PhD student in management; they think I'm looking for work',[6] we work under precarious conditions for at least 3 years, with little to no time off, even for our family. We are often left alone with our anxieties, and we aim for jobs which, in France at least, do not enjoy any particular prestige. The whole PhD experience tends to become one of scrambling to get one's articles published, even though journal articles are only one among many ways to communicate about research, and one that seriously constrains the production of new knowledge (Germain & Taskin, 2017). According to Brown (2015, p. 181):

> The saturation of higher education by market rationality has converted higher education from a social and public good to a personal investment in individual futures, [which] aims at making young scholars not into teachers and thinkers, but into human capitals who learn to attract investors by networking long before they 'go on the market', who 'workshop' their papers, 'shop' their book manuscripts, game their Google scholar counts and 'impact factors', and above all, follow the money and the rankings. Brown (2015 p. 181, 195)

As a senior professor said during a roundtable at the PhD workshop of the 2018 Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Accounting conference – a conference that touts itself as fostering alternative points of view – "I would not recruit someone without a three-star paper".

Thus, publishing is clearly one of the main priorities. However, in France at least, PhD students receive no training in the publication process, with neither supervisors nor universities considering that to be part of their job. As a result, we are left to our own devices in 'figuring it out'. That struggle is defined by two main challenges. Firstly, publishing takes time, and it is almost impossible to get published before finishing your thesis. Secondly, insofar as publishing is another source of anxiety, it reinforces our psychological insecurity because we know from the beginning we won't be able to meet the expectations of the academic community.

As we become entrepreneurs, we act not so much as people seeking to engage meaningfully with their world as managers who are driven to get ahead by exploiting ever more forms of capital, and to doing so by outcompeting other people. This is particularly true for field access and fieldwork, which could be considered the prime capital of PhD students in management. It has been noted for some time now that PhD students are expected to possess a number of skills (networking, knowing how a sector works) before even starting their PhD, rather than being given the time to acquire these skills (Park, 2005). It comes to no surprise, then, that the average age of students upon completion of the PhD is 34.5 years in France (FNEGE, 2018).

Acceleration and alienation

Modern life is in a state of constant acceleration. Speed as a societal norm is naturalised in modern society. The fastest triumphs while the slowest stays behind and loses. Moreover, as temporal structures are taken as a given rather than a social construct, the losers have nobody to blame but themselves (Rosa, 2010). Respect from peers is earned through competition. Speed is essential to competition and is thus essential to respect and recognition. PhD students have to be fast and flexible to gain and maintain recognition, a struggle that simultaneously forces them to accelerate on a continual basis Rosa (2010, pp. 59–60).

Academic life is no exception to acceleration. The temporality problem was mentioned as follows in a call for papers for workshops on business schools and critical management

[6] My translation; http://blog.educpros.fr/isabelle-barth/2013/06/10/ne-dites-pas-a-mes-parents-que-je-suis-doctorant-en-management-ils-croient-que-je-cherche-un-emploi/.

studies that took place at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) in November of 2019: "[*t*]he only temporality is one of constant evaluation, measurement, pace, urgency, etc. The injunction for a single temporality leads to a colonization of the future by forbidding the variety of subjectivities".[7] This is especially true for us PhD students who have a set deadline by which to conduct our field research and accomplish our work. Thus, we become alienated from our work and ourselves, for example, when staying up to work until midnight with nobody but ourselves having asked that of us. Yet if the modern PhD student is an accelerated capitalistic entrepreneur, what does that tell us about our relationship with field research?

Fieldwork access as prime capital

As I have already observed, it has become increasingly more expected of students to begin the PhD process with their own set of skills, which includes fieldwork access. A senior editor at an FT-ranked journal recently mentioned to me during a workshop that it was becoming usual for students to start their fieldwork before the official beginning of their PhD in order to 'save time'. This behaviour has negative consequences for other students, as it gives the community the illusion that students can actually gather quality data and finish their PhD in 3 years. Yet, why would supervisors pause and reconsider such expectations if some students are capable of being so 'high-performing'? Another senior professor remarked that it is even becoming increasingly difficult to gain field access for senior scholars. What then of junior scholars who have no expertise to offer and a much narrower network to rely on?

Fieldwork during the PhD process is often of utmost importance for one's future career as a scholar, since it is with the PhD data that one's big early-career article is going to be written. However, nothing much is said in handbooks or in the literature about how to gain field access (Bruni, 2006). There is a constant fear of losing access, especially as it is not something that you negotiate once and are then done with (Bruni, 2006; Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016; Roulet, Gill, Stenger, & Gill, 2017). We all know at least one story about a student who lost access to empirical data and had to either finish with a worthless thesis or abandon the PhD altogether. Some testimonies heard during the 2018 Critical Management Studies (CMS) doctoral workshop held at the Grenoble École de Management are quite telling: "I was terribly embarrassed […] all I had in mind was that I had just intruded on a family that I didn't know anything about. […] The feeling of being an intruder was particularly strong as it was a small and close-knit group[8]" (Jaumier et al., 2019, p. 1568). Some students find ways to make themselves useful and feel less as intruders: "[t]he activists needed somebody to take pictures during a performance […] which gave me a role inside the group"[9] (Jaumier et al., 2019, p. 1573). Closer to home, I met a young scholar who taught continuing education seminars – normally a well-paid job – free of charge in order to gain contacts and field access. The following year, when I replaced her as the teacher, the seminar's organiser did not understand why I, having no particular interest in access to this field, wanted to get paid.

Gaining and maintaining access is thus very stressful to us. However, as research output accelerates and the time allocated to the PhD process shrinks, access to fieldwork becomes the only way to differentiate students for qualitative research in social sciences. Yet even putting time-consuming fieldwork aside, who seriously believes that anyone can become proficient in an entire body of literature or even just one theory in only 3 years? Indeed, the PhD experience is not about making a relevant theoretical or methodological contribution. Much as the 'elevator pitch' of an entrepreneur, the PhD process is about who can tell the most compelling story, which can be judged quickly and efficiently by looking at the originality and quantity of the data amassed by a student. Otherwise, why would so many of us feel the need to fill our space-constrained journal abstracts with mentions of the number of interviews we conducted or the number of months spent working on an ethnography?

Let's face it: while a few PhD students are truly brilliant (and a few truly clueless), the vast majority of us are just normal people with strong analytical skills and the willingness to work on weekends. The only time-efficient way to differentiate PhD students in the span of 3 years is to look at the data that we gather. It is generally accepted that the more difficult the access, the more interesting the data (MacLean, Anteby, Hudson, & Rudolph, 2006). Therefore, 'What's your empirical data?' has become the PhD student's equivalent of 'What do you do?' as the first question to be asked when we meet a new person. The quality of research is not judged by the power of its arguments but by its ability to rapidly gain recognition. According to Rosa (2010, p. 55):

> In the Social Sciences and the Humanities, there is, at present, hardly a common deliberation about the convincing force of better arguments, but rather a non-controllable, mad run and rush for more publications, conferences and research-projects the success of which is based on network-structures rather than argumentational force.

Fearing, hating and distancing oneself from fieldwork

The above-mentioned state of affairs influences how we might experience fieldwork. We cannot wait to be done with it. We trade tales of successful scholars who have not returned to the

[7] My translation; the title of the call for papers was "Appel à contributions pour la journée scientifique sur les écoles de gestion : objets de la critique mais aussi acteurs de la résistance et de la (leur) transformation ?"

[8] My translation

[9] My translation

field since their thesis defence. More problematically, we try not to ask difficult questions during interviews so as not to waste the interviewees' precious time and ensure we get invited again. As students, we have no expertise and nothing to bring to the table when we negotiate for access, even if professors and handbooks tell us to propose providing feedback to the company during our negotiations (who has ever done that?). Sometimes, we even try to hide our student status (again, as advised by supervisors) because we feel that managers are more likely to accept an interview with a 'real' scholar. I personally felt like a beggar more than once when emailing or talking to a so-called company 'gatekeeper'. Indeed, as the famous writer George Orwell, speaking from first-hand experience, said: "[*a*] man receiving charity practically always hates his benefactor – it is a fixed characteristic of human nature" (Orwell, 1933/2013, p. 186).

Fearing, hating or wanting to get away from fieldwork as quickly as possible encourages many PhD students to adopt a detached attitude, which leads to what Bourdieu and Wacquant called the "intellectualistic bias, which entices us to construe the world as a spectacle, as a set of significations to be interpreted rather than as concrete problems to be solved practically" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 39). By refraining from asking difficult questions, by selecting a field that is easier to access rather than a field in which research would be relevant, we unwillingly develop "unthought categories of thoughts" (Bourdieu, 1982, p. 10).

All this takes place at the most important time in our lives as scholars, insofar as it is during the PhD process that we acquire our identity and reflexivity as researchers (Germain & Taskin, 2017). However, instead of cultivating a healthy habit of doubt, acceleration makes PhD students internalise and objectivate a narrow vision of research by focusing on the traditional and accepted ways to gather data and conduct interviews or ethnographies. Theodor Adorno (1998) called this 'the reification of consciousness' and argued that "the deployment of its ingrained conceptual apparatuses often pre-empts its objects and obstructs culture, which would be one with the resistance to reification. The network in which organized human science has enmeshed its objects tends to become a fetish" (Adorno, 1998, pp. 38–39). Thus, overcome with anxiety, fear or hatred of field research, precisely at a time in our career when we should be pushing new ideas forward, we forget that there are other ways to conduct research: "[y]ounger faculty, raised on neoliberal careerism, are generally unaware that there could be alternative academic purposes and practices to those organized by a neoliberal table of values" (Brown, 2015, p. 198). Again, similar to entrepreneurs, we are encouraged to disrupt business models and simultaneously build a business that will scale upward, and to aim for the type of success that is valued by the business world we are supposedly disrupting.[10]

[10] I would like to thank Helen Taylor for this observation

Unthought categories of thought and the reification of consciousness lead us to internalise a very narrow definition of how science is made and validated. Legitimation in universities occurs only through one's peers, be it during a thesis defence or through publication. Outside sources of legitimation, such as the communication of results to publics other than scholars or concrete, positive impacts in organisations, are not available to PhD students. As social sciences are made more 'professional' through the importation of methods and practices from the hard sciences (Lagasnerie (de), 2011), legitimation becomes an exercise in scientification. Thus, we find ourselves in an inescapable situation. Ironically, the mechanisms that transform us into entrepreneurs and put us under pressure to conform to a narrow definition of research are also those that isolate us further from the world outside academia and cut off our access to other forms of capital and recognition that could make us less dependent. "These forms of academic capital appreciation degrade, rather than augment the value of public research universities in the eyes of the public and the legislators who hold the purse strings" (Brown, 2015, p. 195–196). This outcome might be even more prominent in the French context, where management tends to be marginalised as a social science and has to fight for a place of recognition (e.g. management is merged with economics at the CNRS, the French government research agency, and does not appear separately in most official statistics). The temptation of scientification thus grows insofar as management scholars aspire to be seen as 'real' scientists and are under more pressure to use data collection processes and research designs that mimic those used in the hard sciences.

Critiques of the PhD process under a regime of acceleration

Hartmut Rosa (2010) formulates two critiques of acceleration. Firstly, the functionalist critique, which states that a society that is constantly accelerating will eventually collapse under the weight of its own contradictions, as increasingly more "desynchronizations" (Rosa, 2010, p. 69) occur between social worlds and between the social and extra-social world. For example, the practice of democracy is a time-consuming process and requires increasingly more time as the world accelerates; sooner or later, we will reach a breaking point. Secondly, Rosa makes a normative critique by stating that acceleration is neither moral nor ethical. Temporal norms are not neutral, and they alienate individuals who put themselves under ever more pressure to complete to-do lists that grow ever longer.

From a functionalist point of view, acceleration means that the work of scholars will be less relevant and of a lesser quality. As field access progressively becomes a form of capital, scholars and PhD students will increasingly shy away from collaborating with others. For example, we fear that our data will be stolen

by senior scholars, themselves under pressure to publish more and thus seek more forms of precious data. In fact, one of my colleagues refused a visiting opportunity at a university abroad for fear that her PhD data would be extorted from her. This stands in stark opposition to the scientific ideal. Furthermore, under acceleration, we will continue focusing more on fields that are easy to access and that yield data that can be accepted by our peers according to strict scientific standards and less on interesting fields that are often difficult to study. In marketing, for example, nudge theory[11] is gaining traction both in academic and professional circles. However, it is also a problematic practice that considers consumers to be irrational individuals incapable of learning and changing (Bergeron, Castel, & Dubuisson-Quellier, 2018). Studying this phenomenon would require either lying to interviewees, covert observation or relying exclusively on secondary data. Would such a research design be accepted by our peers? Finally, harder access to data leads to an increasing number of students working directly from inside organisations and on their payrolls (a system called a CIFRE, a research convention with businesses, "Convention industrielle de formation par la recherche", in France). How can we preserve independence and freedom of thought in such cases?

The normative critique goes further and is particularly relevant for CMS scholars. A recent article in *The Guardian* proposed to 'bulldoze the business schools' as they have lost all social relevance (Parker, 2018). According to the article, CMS researchers working from inside these schools, in particular, have lost touch with the schools' missions and mandates; their critique is internalised through the systems of publications and rankings. CMS arguments made from inside the business school tend to lose clout and become a 'systemic critique' (Lagasnerie (de), 2017), in other words, one that is neutralised by the very system it is supposed to fight. As we have seen, the mounting pressure put on the shoulders of PhD students will only compound this effect. Scholars will increasingly distance themselves not only from the field but also from society. How many PhD students working on accounting for CO_2 emissions have I seen taking an airplane to present their findings at a conference, alongside three other scholars who likewise travelled by plane to get there? If critical scholars want to remain relevant, they have to put themselves back at the core of society, not remove themselves from it (Lagasnerie (de), 2011). In addition, beyond CMS, business schools themselves would do well to become more critical if they want to be relevant to society (Woot (de) & Kleymann, 2011).

Conclusion

The more society accelerates, the more time we need to understand, criticise and comment on what is happening. The objects of our studies are a part of society and are no exception to this need. Organisations are evolving faster than ever before, and new modes of organising are emerging all the time. The boundaries between private and professional lives have disappeared. There is no limit to the quantity of electronic data that we exchange every second. And we have less and less time in which to complete our PhDs. In addition to the mounting temporal pressure, we focus more on data and fieldwork that are easily transformed into a capital and focus less on theory, which takes more time and does not translate into anything that is easily and quickly communicable. In that context, how are we as PhD students supposed to produce relevant research? Acceleration is a vicious circle: with less time to complete our PhDs, we focus on less relevant field research, whereby we will progressively lose our usefulness to society, in turn exacerbating the pressure for future PhD students.

In light of the fact we may not be able to 'change the world' and find solutions to the problem of acceleration as a whole, we are left with two alternatives. In the first alternative, PhD students will continue to focus on easier fieldwork and well-known research designs, at the risk of becoming alienated from society and losing relevance to anything that is not a peer-reviewed journal. The second alternative is to accept the difficult conditions we find ourselves under and take steps to mitigate them. We as PhD students are not in a position to say 'no' to our university or to our supervisors; yet at the same time, we cannot afford to say 'no' to ourselves, which is what defines alienation. Thus, we need to protect ourselves. This is not about creating a 'safe space' in which to shelter students from the harshness of academic life that we will inevitably have to face someday. It is about differentiating between what constitutes a good and necessary challenge to the student and what brings about alienation. Being rejected by a journal, failing to secure access to a field and being strongly criticised by peers during a conference are all healthy challenges that will make us good researchers, provided that we have enough time to get back up and try again. A student who has not once seriously considered quitting still probably has something to learn (Germain & Taskin, 2017). It is when we never have enough time that we see every other scholar only as a competitor and every challenge as a life-threatening danger, that we become alienated from ourselves, and that we and our research suffer from this alienation. The pace of the PhD process should not be driven by and determined by publications and instead should allow for exploration (Pezet, 2019).

The PhD experience is crucial to the development of oneself as a researcher, as it is not so much about being trained for research than about being trained by research; this means that space needs to be made for doubt and failures (Germain & Taskin, 2017). Acceleration means that the gap between generations grows wider (Rosa, 2010), which is also true for the gap between students and supervisors. I am only 10 years younger than my supervisors and some of their colleagues; however, it

[11]. Influencing consumer behaviour to achieve 'desirable' outcomes.

would have been unthinkable for most of them to publish in a peer-reviewed journal before their thesis defence. Senior researchers should be more attuned to the acceleration of academic life, do more to understand what their students are going through, and give them time and space to fall down and get back up. It should be easier for students to have someone senior to talk to who is not their supervisor. Collaborations between students, both for papers and for other kinds of research, should be encouraged. Students should be better trained for the publication process, which should be talked about not only in an instrumental way but also with a more critical mindset. More credibility should be given to modes of inquiry that do not comply with the standards of ethnography or semi-structured interviews; for example, secondary data should be less frowned upon. Whatever happens and whatever we might think about it, society and academia will continue to accelerate. Thus, it is up to both junior and senior scholars to find new ways to create relevant research.

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Networking Fatigue, Self-Care and JOMO* in International Research Exchange
*the *joy of missing out*

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In this article, I explore and discuss my experience of academic international mobility. Firstly, my aim is, through theory, to add to our understanding of why being on academic exchange can be very exhausting – even when scholars, as I did, have institutional and social support at home as well as abroad and sufficient financial resources. Secondly, based on my own story of overcoming fatigue while on exchange, I offer a few lessons learnt which may hopefully benefit early-career researchers going abroad in the future.

As a PhD candidate at the Business and Social Science Faculty at Aarhus University, I am required to undertake an institutional research exchange[12] preferably with a university outside of Denmark. The chance to work and live abroad for some months was part of the appeal for me to pursue a PhD position. During my undergraduate degree, I went to Spain for a semester through the European Erasmus Programme[13] and on an internship in Germany for a semester through the student organisation AIESEC.[14] Practically since my enrolment as a PhD student in early 2017, I knew that the destination of my exchange would be the Sociology Department of Northeastern University in Boston, USA. Therefore, I applied for and was awarded a 5-month Fulbright scholarship, which gave me the opportunity to benefit from the support and opportunities that travelling through an organisation offers.

One presumed benefit of the research exchange is that it enables PhD candidates to develop international networks that may lead to academic collaborations and, ideally, jobs in the future. I think of this as the 'networking imperative'. That is why, already before arriving in Boston, I had (1) set up meetings via email with prominent scholars from my field located in the Boston area, (2) arranged a short guest lectureship in Seattle and (3) registered for multiple conferences. While of course very excited, the thought of all these networking activities also almost made me dizzy. Furthermore, when students and early-career researchers go on international exchanges, we are encouraged always to say 'yes' to opportunities that arise. I have experienced this in the context of Erasmus, AIESEC as well as Fulbright. 'You never know what might happen or who you might meet', they all say. In this way, the culture of exchange seems to be characterised by a constant state of *fear of missing out* (FOMO).

I will be the first person to testify how planned as well as random networking encounters may result in exciting opportunities and experiences. Nevertheless, here, I will play the devil's advocate. In this piece, I explore my experience of overcoming what I call 'networking fatigue' and practices of self-care while on exchange. Using the autoethnography of my research exchange in Boston (which is still ongoing in this moment of writing) as a method of inquiry, I advocate for saying 'no' (just occasionally) and champion the notion of *joy of missing out* (JOMO) (see, e.g., Brinkmann, 2019). I further argue that balancing the creation of superficial, instrumental network connections with building deeper, more meaningful relationships is vital to well-being when living abroad.

Theoretical backdrop

This piece takes the form of an autoethnography. Following Haynes (2011, p. 134), I understand autoethnography to encapsulate "a personal, intuitive knowledge, deriving from a knowing subject situated in a specific social context". Writing autoethnographically enables me to engage with personal experiences, emotions and identity, as affected by social and cultural structures (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) in a "search for intelligibility and understanding" (Holland, 2007, p. 198). While autoethnography does not claim generalisability, I believe that stories of individuals' life experiences may in different ways benefit or enrich other people. In order to achieve this, autoethnography must stress a reflexive, dialogical engagement with the self in relation to theory (Haynes, 2011). I unfold the theoretical backdrop of this autoethnography below.

International mobility increasingly makes or breaks the careers of academics. The need to be internationally mobile

12. http://bss.au.dk/en/research/phd/rules-and-regulations/
13. https://www.esn.org/erasmus
14. https://aiesec.org/

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when pursuing a research career is widely believed to limit women disproportionately, especially women in heterosexual family structures (Ackers, 2004). Research has found that single women without children are more likely to engage in international exchanges and collaborations (Uhly, Visser, & Zippel, 2017). That is me. Free of any constraints in terms of a romantic partner or children at home (but with invaluable support from my parents, sister and close friends), I decided to prolong my exchange to 5 months. However, while travelling alone makes the logistics significantly easier, there are many challenges to handle before, during and after the exchange. When travelling alone, you have to deal with those on your own, which makes taking care of yourself perhaps even more pressing.

I would like to stress that I am in no way claiming that readers should feel sorry for me. I do not take for granted that I get to travel as a PhD student, live abroad, and meet and work with amazing scholars. I love my job (yes, in Denmark, a PhD is a paid job, and I get to take my salary with me on my exchange). However, I believe that it is possible – and warranted – to scrutinise those structures of the academic system (such as international mobility requirements or the networking imperative) that in different ways may lead to researcher stress, fatigue and burnout without renouncing all responsibility for neither symptoms nor solution. And as you will see below, I did react. I chose to withdraw.

Audre Lorde (1988) famously stated 'Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare'. Following its feminist origin, self-care is about survival. Oppressive systems, such as the hyper-competitive, neoliberal and academic labour market, do not want us to survive. Academia is an elimination process. Only very few make it all the way. Thus, stepping out of that system to recuperate in order to persevere becomes a radical defiance (see also Mountz et al., 2015). However, as the borders between work and leisure time are increasingly blurred, stepping out of work becomes increasingly difficult. Guy Standing's (2014) writings help us to understand why that is.

Standing (2014) makes the distinction between *labour* and *work* – *labour* being the remunerated activities associated with an employment. *Work*, on the other hand, refers to all work that is not *labour*, such as 'work-for-labour', which are the activities individuals need to do in order to ensure *labour*. Traditionally, *labour* activities are expected to occur in industrial time, that is, on the clock and usually for a certain number of hours per day or week. *Work* activities, on the other hand, occur in tertiary time – a time in which *work* and *labour* are jumbled in a 24/7 environment (Standing, 2013). Under this light, networking is also *work* because networks are widely considered important to succeed in academic careers (e.g. Smith-Doerr, 2004; van den Brink & Benschop, 2013), and it may be crucial to ensure collaborations, information about funding or job opportunities (e.g. Benschop, 2009; Whittington, 2018). However, when networking occurs, for example, at the bar at night after a conference, or when 'coffee meetings' take time away from writing papers, networking becomes a work-for-labour in a tertiary time. Such work-for-labour activities are often added on top of regular labour hours on the clock and may, therefore, add stress and strain for some. Furthermore, networking is emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983). You cannot network without putting yourself on the line and showing empathy and interest in other people. Moreover, while networking may be fun and rewarding, in my experience, even for an extrovert, too much of it can be draining.

My story

People have often told me that I am 'good at networking', and I guess it is true; I have never been shy when it comes to reaching out to people I found interesting or who I would like to know for one reason or another. I have always been a very social and outgoing person, and, as I hinted at in the Introduction, I love to travel. Therefore, I was really excited to indulge in the opportunities awaiting in Boston.

It is important to note that my research exchange is taking place now, in the final year of my PhD. Under the Danish system, I have 3 years to write my dissertation, which should consist of at least three published or publishable papers. My amazing host supervisor, Prof. Kathrin Zippel, was forwarding information about the most important events and conferences taking place during my stay in the United States already before my arrival. I stressed that I needed her to help me prioritise my time because I should focus primarily on my writing (and here I am now, writing something not remotely related to my research topic). While I am relatively well on my way with my dissertation (knock on wood!), in order to finish on time, I have to follow a quite tight schedule during the remaining 8–9 months. As such, I needed to find an appropriate balance between work (*labour*) and pleasure (*work*) while in Boston. Given the following, it may not seem that I succeeded.

When I first arrived, I took full advantage of the opportunities for socialising that Fulbright offered. Already in my first weekend here, I went to the monthly pub night as well as a concert and dinner event. Fulbright hosts these great events to help travelling students and scholars thrive. They are occasions to make friends, to have cultural experiences and to ensure that scholars are not isolated and only work while abroad. It is important to note that attending these events is not mandatory. Nevertheless, I experienced a strong tacit expectation in the Fulbright community that we should participate in their events because why would we want to *miss out* on them?

Also, in Boston, not only are there about a million colleges and universities, but many of these also have gender studies programmes and departments offering fascinating open lectures, workshops and much more. It may come as a surprise to some, but in Denmark gender studies is not very well institutionalised. For instance, the only gender research talks I hear at home are usually the ones I co-organise myself.[15] Therefore, I welcomed the opportunity to engage in these dialogues here in Boston, and while the events I have attended were all in different ways very interesting, I eventually hit a wall. That wall was 'networking fatigue', which showed itself in noticeable changes in my behaviour. Below, I give two examples hereof.

Example 1

I had submitted to present a paper at a 3-day conference in Boston in March. At this point, I had already been to a conference in Denver, Colorado, and had just come back from a busy week as a guest lecturer in Seattle. To be honest, I did not feel much like going, but I felt that I should. Academically, I was not sure how much I would gain from the particular panel on which I was going to present. The other speakers' topics were quite far from my own, and even if I did get useful feedback, my paper was already submitted to a journal and was already out of my hands. I participated in the first session of the first day at the conference, but I was mentally absent. I chose to go to that session because the convenor was a renowned scholar, who I wanted to meet. The same day, my university hosted an exciting feminist symposium that I could not miss. So, I hurried from the conference and managed to make it to the last session of the symposium. I started getting a headache, which I rarely have. That same evening, a friend from another university was celebrating his birthday at a bar, and I went there straight after the symposium. At the birthday celebration, the other guests, who were all international scholars, were very nice and talkative. However, the only conversation I could manage at that point was with one of the scholars' sweet 3-year-old son. Besides that, I did not engage much in their conversations. All I could think was 'When would it be okay for me to sneak out?' My headache got worse. That was when I decided that I was not going to the conference any more that weekend. I went home, and I sent out emails to the other speakers on my panel, informing them that I would not be able to come (none of them replied), and I mentioned to one Northeastern colleague that I would stay home. I am sure my absence was absolutely insignificant in the grand scheme of things. However, I have always been a dutiful person, and bailing like this is not in my character – that is, it felt like bailing to me. But it was the right decision in that moment, and I took that weekend for some much needed downtime in my flat, alone, to recharge my energy.

Example 2

During the first initial months of my stay in the United States, I participated in various Fulbright get-togethers, both social and more formal events. There are many 'Fulbrighters' in Boston, and it was never the same people who showed up. While people are always nice, repeating the same routine 'get to know each other' questions and answers time after time became tedious. Often, the conversations would fall back to cultural differences – 'Oh your country is like that? Well my country is like this'. I recall going once to the monthly Fulbright pub night but not staying very long. Normally, having a beer at the pub with friends is my preferred way of going out as it is very laid-back, and I can relax. But when it comes to a 'networking' event with 25+ participants, who do not know each other, I felt like I was performing a very reductive version of myself through the repetition of the same short scripts over and over again. Nevertheless, every time I went to a Fulbright gathering, I would meet at least one person with whom I had good chemistry. I would ask them, either in the meeting or in a message afterwards, if they would like to hang out. For a Dane, with our somewhat guarded cultural traits, this is very forward behaviour and made me feel uncomfortable. However, I had nothing to lose, and it proved worth the vulnerability because it enabled me to initiate friendships that we could build on. It was such relief to go to a museum, take a stroll, have a coffee or a lunch with these new friends, and I am convinced they felt the same. One of them said to me the first time we hung out: "[s]orry, I'm just telling you all of this… but maybe that's okay, I guess we're friends now", giving the impression that she had also longed for someone to confide in.

In addition, I was making friends outside of the context of Fulbright. The other PhD scholars of my Northeastern department immediately included me in their social activities, and seeing each other most days at the office also allowed me to get to know most of them beyond the small-talk level. In short, I found that once I had established those friendships in which I could have meaningful conversations with people I myself had chosen to be with, I no longer felt the urgency to be part of the networking game.

Networking fatigue and self-care

Being on exchange means being in a constant state of work-for-labour in a tertiary time because the exchange is compulsory in the Danish PhD system. Undoubtedly, it is *fantastic* to be abroad. But I am not at 'home' (in terms of culture, language, accommodation, etc.), and that makes it harder to be off work

15. https://projects.au.dk/genderinginresearch/

when I am not working. In my experience, the networking imperative is one reason for that, but in two different ways.

Firstly, as a PhD candidate, you are already never really off work. Academics work many hours, during weekends, and most of us probably think about our research constantly. I am always longing to know more, so usually, I desperately want to go to academic events and meet other scholars from my field. However, I have found that to depend very much on context. That is, under normal circumstances, at home, I have my familiar routines, my flat, my work, my friends. On this backdrop, travelling to a conference to network with interesting new people is a refreshing change that gives me energy, and I enjoy it. But while on exchange, when the default mode for every situation is unfamiliarity, and I constantly have to adapt to new places, new people, new customs, networking eventually becomes tiring. Secondly, while 'the networking imperative' mostly concerns professional-academic networking, during my exchange, social networking has also been imperative to me personally. That is, even making friends became part of the additional emotional work I needed to do to thrive. I unfold this a bit more below.

In summary, networking is not only encouraged on exchange; it is unavoidable, making superficial professional and social relationships the norm. Therefore, unless we find a counter-balance to that, of deeper, meaningful relationships, internationally mobile scholars may reach their limit and experience networking fatigue.

As described in my stories above, I experienced networking fatigue mentally and physically, which made it easier to respond to my need to unwind. I know me, and I realised that I had stretched myself with all the networking activities I had planned. Nevertheless, FOMO was lurking, and I wanted to make the absolute most of my time in the United States. My response to networking fatigue was quite simple. I withdrew and decompressed. What permitted me to do that was the fact that I had made particular choices, which enabled me to live roughly in the same manner as I am used to at home.

For example, since moving out from my childhood home many years ago, I have always lived in small flats alone, except for my exchanges in Spain and Germany. As I get older, I become ever more adamant about my privacy. Therefore, I went for the more expensive accommodation alternative (and I was privileged that I had the finances to do that), that is, to live in a small place by myself. I guess that if you are used to living with other people, living alone while abroad can feel lonely. But for me, because I am used to living on my own, it would have been much more difficult to relax when I really needed to if I could not be myself in the place where I live.

Another example is my choice to prioritise building deeper relationships over networking. I realised that I longed for meaningful conversations when I caught myself spilling my guts about a personal issue to someone whom I felt just marginally more familiar with than my average acquaintance in the United States. I would like to stress that while networking with prominent scholars often had a deliberate instrumental aim, when it comes to making friends, it was never a conscious calculus as in 'I need to make friends with this person, otherwise I will be unhappy'. Once I had created a few deeper relationships, it happened organically that I simply did not seek out the social networking contexts any longer.

While I was of course never forced in any way to go to all those conferences or social networking events, the culture of exchange and my internalised FOMO led me to do more than what was good for me. That is why I champion JOMO on exchange (at least occasionally) because in order to survive – let alone thrive – in a foreign country, I need my strength. Preserving and prioritising self-care also enable me to be more present and give more when I decide to engage in networking, which benefits the connections I establish.

Concluding remarks

While Fulbright offers some cultural preparation, not all travelling scholars are as equipped as Fulbrighters. But even then, you can never be 100% prepared. As mentioned previously, I am an extrovert, and I love to travel. Going on exchange for me is a labour of love. I love to do it, but it *is* labour. With three living abroad experiences, by now, I have gained a pretty good sense of how I can best take care of myself in foreign environments. However, other early-career researchers may not have this knowledge. For example, my home university requires PhD students to go abroad, says that it is good for us, and then it is up to us to either swim or sink when we go.

It may seem counterintuitive that I am advocating for living abroad in a manner that is similar to what we do at home because then why go abroad at all? However, maintaining some degree of familiarity – whatever that might entail for the individual person – might be key to ensuring the energy needed for constant networking. In other words, what will allow a particular person to practise self-care on exchange is of course an individual matter, but they may want to consider what that is before going.

Autoethnography is tricky. Sharing my story with readers makes me vulnerable. I was even advised not to publish this piece because it might negatively affect potential future employers' assessment of my personality and 'resilience'. In addition, putting the stories into words makes them seem very banal, as if I felt guilty about 'bunking off' a conference, and now I am trying to justify it as something more than that. Critical voices may say that it is blowing a little bit of exhaustion out of proportion to write a piece like this one about it. My objective was never to wallow in self-pity because I do not feel sorry for

myself at all. Rather, I hope to provide early-career researchers going on exchange with useful insights based on my experience. Ideally, such insights may spur reflections in advance about what constitutes an appropriate balance between networking and JOMO for readers going on exchange in the future, instead of in hindsight as in my case.

On a final note, I am wondering whether the stress and strain associated with research exchanges is simply one way in which we experience that academia is a greedy institution (Hey, 2004; Hunter & Leahy, 2010) that only keeps on taking. Maybe reaching the edge of what we can endure is part of the purpose of exchange. There is no doubt that we learn more about ourselves under pressure than when we are comfortable. These are certainly important lessons if we want to pursue an academic career because the demands of academia will only increase over time. Therefore, the main lesson that I take with me from this experience is that I have to learn to distinguish between actual requirements, expectations (institutional, social as well as my own), and recognise my boundaries, so that I can sustain myself while navigating through all of that. The bottom line is, I would say, we *have to* say 'no' – and we might as well enjoy it when we do.

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M@n@gement

The Fact of the Belly: A Collective Biography of Becoming Pregnant as a PhD Student in Academia

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The personal is professional

> Those of us who arrive in an academy that was not shaped by or for us bring knowledges, as well as worlds, that otherwise would not be here. Think of this: how we learn about worlds when they do not accommodate us. Think of the kinds of experience you have when you are not expected to be here. These experiences are a resource to generate knowledge. (Ahmed, 2017, pp. 9–10)

In this article, we explore how pregnancy is experienced in an everyday academic setting, and how being pregnant affects the PhD journey. Pregnancy may, at first, be assumed 'private' or 'personal' and, therefore, not relevant in a 'professional' academic context. Yet, it is not unusual that PhD candidates in Denmark (including at our own institution: CBS) decide to have children while enrolled in PhD. One reason may be that a PhD position in Denmark comes with a full salary, pension and benefits, such as 1 year of paid parental leave. In this article, we embark on 'personally relevant research' (Greenberg, Clair, & Lagde, 2018) and think of the private, personal and the professional as *entangled* (Barad, 2007, 2014). They are always-already affecting one another so that it becomes difficult or at least futile to distinguish between them. Becoming pregnant while employed affects not only your private life but also your professional life. And it – as we will show – renders the personal professional. Becoming pregnant while on a professional (PhD) journey will affect that journey. The pregnant body is signified by *the fact of the belly*,[16] it comes to mean something. The pregnant belly cannot *not* signify.

The Danish parental leave system fosters gender inequality, with mothers overwhelmingly taking the responsibility of childcare during parental leave and fathers committing to 10% on average.[17] The imbalance is not necessarily problematic in itself. However, we may problematise the imbalance with reference to studies showing that taking up parental leave diminishes possibilities of career advancement, access to leadership positions as well as future earnings (Gupta, Smith, & Verne, 2008). The so-called 'child penalty' creates an approximate 20% gender pay gap in earnings in the long run (NBER, 2018). A 2018 report from Boston Consulting Group confirms that the largest leak in the talent pipeline happens from age 30 to 40 (BCG, 2018). This is identified as the period during which career progression and family expansion usually take place, with the latter impacting the former adversely. At CBS, the career path begins to split after PhD level: the graph showing women's and men's representation in academic positions starts opening up like a pair of scissors, with the widest gap at the professor level. Four out of five professors are men (The Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2015). This picture has not changed over the past 20 years. It is our assertion, however, that the implications of having children do not begin with parental leave but when the belly starts to grow, show and imply meaning.

We are interested in understanding the wider implications of pregnancy and in investigating what we will term the *microimplication of becoming pregnant* as part of the PhD journey. With the microimplications of becoming pregnant we refer to *the meaning of pregnancy ascribed to a pregnant body by someone, as implied by the character of that someone's social interaction with that pregnant body*. We created the concept of microimplication by repurposing Grice's (1975, p. 24) pragmatic concept of 'implicature'. An implicature is something that is not explicitly expressed by a speaker, but implied or suggested. Grice (1975) makes a distinction between 'particular', 'conventional' and 'general' conversational implicatures. Here, we borrow largely from the notion of particular, context- and situation-specific conversational implicatures. We will elaborate on this throughout the article. To this end, we present two memory stories, each a product of a collective biography workshop where all three authors worked together to collectively understand the two memory events. The body of text that makes up the two memory stories should be understood as a form of writing where the basis of knowledge is the embodied experiences of power (Ahmed, 2017).

The article has four parts. (1) We explain collective biography. (2) We present the two memory stories. (3) We spell out the

[16] The concept 'the fact of the belly' is inspired by Frantz Fanon's concept 'the fact of blackness' (Fanon, 1952).

[17] Parents can take 52 weeks of leave in total, of which 32 weeks can be shared between them as the parents see fit (18 weeks are reserved for the parent giving birth, 2 weeks for the other parent). See, for example, '13th International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2017' (2017) and 'Køn: Status 2019' (2019).

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microimplications of the fact of the belly. (4) We speculate in and discuss what it means to be pregnant in academic settings and what happens to nonconforming bodies in an androcentric academic department, with an overwhelming overrepresentation of men,– especially in senior faculty and management positions.

Collective biography

> In collective biography a group of researchers work together on a particular topic, drawing on their own memories relevant to that topic, and through the shared work of telling, listening and writing, they move beyond the clichés and usual explanations to the point where the written memories come as close as they can make them to 'an embodied sense of what happened'. (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 3)

The collective biography workshop was inspired by the methodic practices laid out by Davies and Gannon (2012; see also Davies et al., 2013; Davies, Browne, Gannon, Honan, & Sommerville, 2005; De Schauwer, Van De Putte, & Davies, 2018). In writing a collective biography we are concerned with the more-than-representational in the sense that the memory stories are not presumed to represent the memory events as they 'really' happened. Rather, we are interested in *re*-presenting the memory stories in a manner that allows us to explore their affectivity by bringing forth the embodied sensations of the memory events. It is the way in which – through "collaborative attention to detail" (Davies & Gannon, 2012, p. 360) – the memory stories come to resonate with all of us and become intensely felt that makes them real.

For practical reasons and akin to the adaptation in the work of Basner, Christensen, French, and Schreven (2018), we focused our collective attention on Sara's memories, rather than having all three memory-workers bring their own memories. Sara is the only one of the authors with lived experience of embodying pregnancy. Sharing her experiences of being pregnant during her PhD enabled us all to dive deeper into the microimplications of the fact of the belly. By exploring this topic, it was soon made clear to us all that the decision to have children – to become a parent – affects the journey. Parenthood affects women and men differently. Our sensation was that this differentiating factor of PhD life had its inception during pregnancy. Thomas, one of the male authors, has also experienced becoming a parent in an academic setting. His experience is one of almost becoming invisible, where pregnancy and parenthood are absent in professional life. We may say that to Thomas's body the pregnancy was a non-fact. In stark contrast to this stands the experience of Sara whose pregnancy – as the memory stories will tell – is difficult to hide. She, her body, is highly visible, physically, as her belly sticks out and takes more space than usual. This very fact of the belly translates into a different lived PhD experience, one that is undeniably embodied, giving birth to different affective states.

Our main concern is to examine the embodied sensations and affective states of the memory stories. The purpose is to draw out their affective and material details through descriptions that move and resonate with us as memory-workers. The choice of collective biography begs the question of what the collective mood brings that the autobiographical method (e.g. Daskalaki, Butler, & Petrovic, 2016) lacks? Sara could easily have explored her personal encounters by herself through autoethnographic accounts (e.g. Awasthy, 2015; Hearn, 2003; O'Shea, 2018). The motivation for using collective biography is that we, as a collective of authors, want to dive into and explore the affective implications of the fact of the belly. As the memory events we base this piece on are situated in everyday, informal interactions with colleagues, there are no formal 'field notes' of the exchanges. Moreover, an ambition for the workshop was to move beyond mere reflection, as in mirroring or representing the memory events as something of the past. Working collectively on the memory stories enabled us to bring out, enrich and more vividly describe those affective dimensions, which are easily taken for granted by the memory-holder. While Thomas and Jannick cannot put themselves in the place of Sara, or any other pregnant body for that matter, they wanted to understand the implications of becoming a pregnant body in the context of an academic institution. Sara, on the other hand, wanted not to be alone or isolated with her experience. In our first discussion of this article, she initially relativised her experiences, doubting whether she was 'right' to feel out-of-place. After all, she has a privileged position in the Danish system, benefiting from relatively generous family policies. We wanted to explore and understand the pregnant experience on its own terms *as a collective* without judging it, juxtaposing it with or relativising it to any other PhD experiences.

The collective biography workshop, effectively, is a methodology for affective research. And as Knudsen and Stage (2015, p. 3) suggest:

> The development of methodologies for affect research should be regarded as an interesting zone of inventiveness, a zone raising reflections about what 'the empirical' produced tells us about the world and about the research setting, and a zone allowing us to generate new types of empirical material and perhaps to collect material that has previously been perceived as banal or unsophisticated.

Knudsen and Stage (2015) specifically mention accounts of researchers' bodily states as an example of inventive ways for generating empirical material. In the remainder of this section, we present a walkthrough of how we went about conducting our collective biography workshop.

Ahead of the memory workshop, Sara wrote a first iteration of her memory stories for Thomas and Jannick to read in preparation for the workshop. They, in turn, added initial questions to the text. At this stage, questions were mainly points of

clarification about passages in the text where the words and formulations seemed distant to Thomas and Jannick where the sentences were complete, yet with the sensory descriptions lacking in detail in order to touch the affective dimension. A telling example of this is from Memory Story 1, in which Sara describes that she is pregnant and that she can no longer hide this fact of the belly. But as neither Thomas nor Jannick has any bodily recollection of what that entails, both curiously asked for a more detailed account of what the pregnant body in the memory event feels like, what it looks like, and what emotional labour goes into trying to hide this growing fact of the belly. Asking questions with a "strong situational specificity" is, as Knudsen and Stage (2015, p. 3) also argue, a necessary step for grounding, empirically, the analysis of affective processes. The explication of gender in both memory stories is another and equally telling example: initially, none of the memory events provided any explicit mentioning of gender; the terms 'they' and 'their' were used as gender-neutral pronouns to refer to Sara's colleagues. As Thomas and Jannick began probing, gender came forth as entangled, affectively, with the bodily reactions and changes. The men in both memory stories (i.e. Sara's male colleagues), in short, distance themselves when confronted with the fact of the belly – by means of irony and ridicule. The woman addresses the fact of the belly directly, trying to connect with it through own embodied experience. We are, of course, not suggesting any generalisation based on this reading; we merely point to how the entanglement of certain things begin to 'glow' (MacLure, 2013a, 2013b) and show greater significance for our thought and writing as the memory workshop progressed.

We collectively decided to begin the workshop with Sara reading her memory stories aloud. Listening to Sara's voice and watching her as she re-lived the events when sharing them prompted Thomas and Jannick to probe the text before them not in chronological order but in accordance with the different affective intensities it created in the room. We recorded the entire session (3 h) for us to listen through and use as a companion when re-writing the memory stories. The final iterations of the memory stories – as included in this article – are thus the product of several re-workings and re-shapings of the body given to the text. The said re-workings are a collective endeavour: Having elaborated on the initial version of the memory stories based on the collective attention to details at the workshop, we continued to circulate the text among us until none of us felt we had any more to say. At this critical stage the body given to the text is saturated with the affect that resonates with all memory-workers and not just the original memory-holder.

The situation of a woman sharing a story with two men (who do not share any experiences with microimplications of pregnancy) could easily become a classic setup, where a woman's bodily and emotional experiences are explained by men. There are two things to say to this: (1) this is a collective project concerned with collectively understanding a single person's lived experience; insofar as the work of analysis and conceptualisation is concerned, there is no opposition between the members of the collective. Thus, we humbly suggest that in coming together to work collaboratively we turned the moment of the collective biography workshop into movement towards translating lived experience (de Beauvoir, 1953) into shared experience. Lived experience, given that it is about a particular and hence subjective experience, is not necessarily shareable. Yet, Davies et al. (2013, p. 684, italics in original) point to how collective biography work is where the memories become and "*are* the subject", not "*of* the subject". This brings us to the second point: (2) the men are not explaining the woman what her experience means; the men involved are not able to have an experience of the fact of the pregnant belly, but they are willing to appreciate its affects and understand its ramifications. It is an occasion for empathetically learning about an experience they are unable to have and to develop a sensitivity to this particular situation and to similar situations.

Memory story 1

My old department has recently merged with another department, and I have got a new office and new colleagues. I am a PhD student halfway through my studies. And I am also pregnant.

Simultaneously with getting the new office and new colleagues, it started to become impossible for me to hide my growing belly.

Having experienced pregnancy before, the changing of my body was not new to me. I was not reacting to the change with amazement, curiously inspecting the belly in the mirror when changing clothes as I did the first time. The bump was just there. And it was growing. It was an expected fact. A tangible, physical fact.

Starting as a feeling of bloatedness, it began manifesting itself as a more solid extension of my body, going from a rounding of the belly to an actual bump, bulging out over the lining of my pants.

The bump hindered me from wearing my normal trousers and it made the clothes I could wear fit differently. I became aware how different material of the clothes could disguise or reveal the bump. The urge to hide my pregnancy was strong. I did not want the focus to go from me as a person to my pregnant body, with all the conversations, tips, sharing of experiences and pieces of advice that come with it.

The winter season gave me all kinds of excuses to wear big sweaters, and I became a master of layering clothes – all as a means of disguising the growing belly.

I became painfully aware of how I was sitting, standing and walking. How I was carrying my body. Counterposing. Arching and rounding the back, to let the belly sink in and not pop out.

Always sitting straight, never leaning back. It exposes the front, and the belly.

Crossing my arms in front of me. But not too much. It is a commonly known telling sign that pregnant women touch their bellies. So never, *never* touch my belly, hold my belly or in any way draw attention to that part of the body.

Always keeping in mind how to carry my body in a way that could hide the belly occupied my mind space, and sometimes it made me lose focus of what was said in meetings or conversations. It is like when you are thinking about the fact that you are lying, and then trying to hold a steady gaze, looking the other person in the eyes. Because you know that straying eyes are a sign of lying. But being too conscious and overdoing the steady look will also expose you as a liar.

I was focused to find the right balance between acting relaxed and natural in my bodily actions without being obviously hiding something. The winter season was not just an excuse to wear oversized clothes, it also meant Christmas parties and get-togethers, all including alcohol. Being a married woman in my early 30s saying 'no' to alcohol, in private or professional settings, is guaranteed to get pregnancy rumours started.

I shamelessly exaggerated my son's bad sleeping habits, to give me an excuse to not drink alcohol and leave early, alternatively not to attend alcohol-related Christmas activities at all.

I specifically remember how unfairly treated I felt when I had to present excuses and explanations to saying 'no' to beers at the Christmas party, while my female colleague with an Arabic name was left without questions. I could not lean up against my colleagues' assumptions of religious reasons; in their eyes, the only reason why I was not drinking could obviously be that I was pregnant. But there was also something else.

I have always been uncomfortable with comments to my body in professional settings as they limit my space of action.

I have been sexualised and made aware of my body at every workplace I have had since I was 14, ranging from well-intended compliments to straight out sexual harassments.

It feels like I cannot escape being my body, that what I say and do cannot stand alone but always are accompanied by my body. Hiding my pregnancy was a way to postpone or avoid this feeling.

It was the beginning of March, the belly had grown to a point where no back arching, arm crossing or big sweaters could hide the obvious fact that I was pregnant, and this was stressing me out.

The stressy feeling, enforced by being in a new professional environment, gave me a vague tension or ache in my stomach, always expecting a confrontation or uncomfortable conversation.

Many times, I tried to avoid presumed questions or comments by proactively taking control over conversations, asking the other a lot of questions or talking without space for interruptions.

Though sometimes I gave in to the feeling and kept to myself, I could not be bothered to play the game…

It is close to lunch time. I can hear the early lunchers rummaging around in the kitchen, but I cannot see who it is from my office. My stomach rumbles and makes loud noises.

I looked at the clock. Maybe I could just go to the kitchen, get my lunch box and eat it at the office, but that would be weird, I should socialise with my new colleagues. That is what professional, well-mannered people do. They socialise and build networks, creating future opportunities.

I waited a bit longer. Maybe more people will come, and there will be someone I know.

The noise from the voices in the kitchen was increasing as the informally agreed lunch time approached.

I was too hungry to get any work done; I could not deny my body food any longer. I took a deep breath, braced myself and closed the office door walking out to the kitchen. There were new faces sitting at the lunch table, and I could not see anyone familiar. I smiled and said a general 'Bon appetit' to the table. I walked to the fridge and grabbed my lunch box. Voices were muttering and chattering at the lunch table. While putting my food on a plate to heat it in the microwave oven, a new colleague, a woman in her 40s, approached me:

'Oh that food looks great'.

'Yeah, I generally prefer to bring my own food, the canteen gets less exciting after a couple of years at CBS', I answer. The new colleague smiled. I relaxed. This is a nice conversation.

'You are one of the new ones, no? Where are you from?' she asked me. Good. This is not as bad as I expected it to be. I decided to take the opportunity to present myself.

'I am from the Department of Business and Politics, my PhD is funded by the AlterEcos Project, do you know it? We look into alternative forms for organizing within the financial sector'.

'Ah DBP. Nice. And I can see that you are expecting. Congratulations! How far are you? Isn't it the best experience ever to be pregnant?'

I freeze mentally and the surprise makes me hesitant. How do I answer? I really do not want to talk about my pregnancy with someone I do not know. I do not think that being pregnant is the most amazing thing, but I know by experience that saying such thing will cause strange looks and an even longer conversation about being pregnant and motherhood.

I smile stiffly. How can I get the conversation back to professional stuff? And what do I answer? I'm stressing out, I must say something now or it becomes socially awkward.

'Yes. I'm having a baby in July'. Not really knowing where to look. Hoping for the microwave oven to be signalling that the food is ready. Fuck. I should have asked her something. Stupid. I had the chance to take control over the conversation. I missed it. I feel stressed and disappointed with myself, for not taking control over the situation I was dreading…

'Oh that is just great. Summer babies are just the easiest. You do not need that much clothes, and you will just have vacation all summer. My two kids are from May and June. It was such a great experience. But I guess you should be careful; the heat last summer was crazy. Might not be a dream scenario, neither being pregnant or having a small baby. Fingers crossed it was just a one-time thing, right?'

I am torn between the feeling of just taking my food and leave and being polite and acknowledge what my stranger colleague said, maybe ask some questions about her children. Why is it so hard to say stop that I am not comfortable in this situation? I'm smiling politely, take my food and say:

'That sounds nice. Hope you will have a productive afternoon' and go the few meters to the lunch table. It is nearly full, but there is a spot between two senior staff, both men and both, unfamiliar to me. I aim for that spot.

'Is this seat free?', I said as I got closer to the table. They both nodded and smiled but continued their ongoing conversation.

Sitting down, I felt awkward and misplaced. Invited to the table but not included in the conversation, which would be common courtesy at a lunch table in the workplace.

Eating my food silently, I tried to follow the conversation to get a chance to contribute, or at least make myself visible.

There is no break in the conversational flow, like the conversation between old friends. One starts filling in before the first one has finished. Internal references mixed with half-finished sentences and laughter.

I gave myself some slack and gave up the attempt of being part of this conversation. I finished my food. Feeling disappointed, but also angry for the impoliteness and exclusion. I thought of the expression 'It takes two to tango'. It is not just my responsibility. I stood up intending to leave the table. One of the men turned and said directed at me:

'Can you pass with that big belly of yours?'

Looking smilingly at the colleague at the other side of me, I freezed again. Stopping for an instant, the motion of pushing the chair back under the table.

Surprised.

Did he really just say that? I felt perplexed. There is more than plenty of space around the table to pass my colleague, so this must be a joke and not a considerate remark. The colleagues laughed in unison. Continuing their conversation. I left with the feeling of never wanting to have lunch at that table and with those men again. The lunchroom has become a minefield, where I never know when something will blow up in my face.

Memory story 2

I have agreed to eat early lunch with a colleague from my former department, as I have a meeting at 12:30.

As we were eating, more and more colleagues were gathering around the lunch table. My colleague and I talked about his teaching and plans for the coming weekend. As I had finished my food, I prepared for leaving the table.

'Oh well, I think it is time for me to get going so I get to that meeting in time', I said, collecting my stuff. My old colleague looked at me, smiling, and asking:

'Wasn't your meeting at 12:30? Where was it? It is just 12:10 now'.

'Yes, at *Kilen*', I answered, getting up and starting to put my dirty dishes into the dishwasher. A new colleague looked at my old colleague laughingly and said:

'You know, pregnant women are very slow. It is best to give them their time'.

I felt angry. My heart started beating, and I felt the blood flow to my neck and face. Reddening, getting warm cheeks. They knew nothing about what I had to do before the meeting and how much time it takes. I also have my bike, so my pregnancy does not impair my ability of transporting myself around campus. I know saying all that will just incite comments on how I do not understand jokes or that I am being sensitive and emotional as a pregnant woman. It makes me frustrated. There is no good way of answering. My old colleague picks up on the joke.

'Yes. With all that extra weight. It is good you are taking your time. We do not want you to be late'.

Common laughter. Other colleagues around the table started laughing as well. I felt super uncomfortable. It embarrassed me, this unwanted attention from the lunch table. I was also disappointed with my colleague that I knew from my former department, to participate and contribute to the joke. I became the laughingstock of the lunch table. Like a stab in the stomach, I felt an urge to defend myself. But I did not know how.

'Maybe I should call you a taxi? I can arrange with the Head of Department to put aside some funds for preggers taxis. What time do you want me to order the taxi?'

Even more laughter. My thoughts were running wild. How could I get out of this situation without being even more made fun of even more?

'Well, I do need to finish some stuff at the office before I leave for the meeting'. Polite again. Explaining. Trying to render approval or acceptance for my actions. Not showing the disappointment, anger or discomfort. Not having the strategies for how I can put my foot down in a constructive way. Leaving the situation in status quo. Not making them aware of the impact of their sayings and doings. Not standing up for myself. Angry and disappointed.

'Have a nice weekend', I said, leaving the lunch table.

The microimplications of co-workers

As already mentioned in the Introduction, microimplication grasps the meaning ascribed to something (Sara's pregnant belly) by someone (Sara's colleagues) as expressed by that someone's interaction with that something. A microimplication

is when actual action betrays the implied meaning. The notion of microimplications was developed in the course of our workshop. While familiar with the concept of microaggressions (see, e.g., DeSouza, Wesselmann, & Ispas, 2017; Sue et al., 2007), we needed a different term in order to conceive what we could sense happening in the memory stories. The sense of unease is grounded in those small details, those tiny acts that are not aggressive but affective. We acknowledge that some of the interactions from the memory stories can be interpreted as microaggressions. What we suggest is that even if we interpret them as such there is more to these microaggressions than merely aggression, and we want to challenge this feeling of the offensive that comes with naming something as an aggression.

Let us examine the situations in the memory stories: what other strategies could the woman at the microwave have chosen given the implication that she knows that the other part (Sara) is pregnant? She could have ignored it; she could have asked open questions (rather than normative, closed ones that imply a correct answer) if she was adamant to make pregnancy the topic; she could have waited for an invitation to converse about the pregnancy. How could the male senior staff have acted on the implication? They could have ignored the pregnancy; they could have struck up conversation with the new colleague (Sara); they could have abstained from making jokes as well as from participating in laughing; one could have asked the other to stop laughing. How could the colleague that Sara know from her former department have acted on the implication of the pregnant body relative to the time of the meeting? He could have been quiet; he could have checked his assumptions; he could have abstained from participating in building a joke; he could have checked his moral compass; he could have checked whether Sara validated the joke by laughing with them; or he could have countered the first statement made about the speed of pregnant women. In all three instances there were other viable options available; therefore, the particular courses of action are in no way necessary ones. They are actions made legitimate by the implied meaning of the fact of the belly.

A microimplication is an implied meaning made explicit via the act it legitimises and motivates. The implied meaning is not articulated; it is not tested for verity or falsity, but acted upon. So, we have to ask *what microimplications can be read from the particular acts?* They all share the implied meaning that addressing the pregnant body is both a socially and intersubjectively acceptable thing to do – and also in ways that would not seem legitimate, were the female body not pregnant. They differ in the rest: the first act suggests that it is implied that pregnancy is a good thing. The second act implies that it is okay to make a comment on how the pregnant body moves in a room and to joke about the assumed (in)abilities of the pregnant body, but also that to make that comment is appropriate to begin with in light of the prior non-communication between the parties. The laughter implies that it is a fun situation and unless it is read as an act of belittling cruelty, that it is an innocent joke. The third act implies that the speakers know what it means to be pregnant, that they know its capacities and inabilities sufficiently to be able to construct a joke *in situ*.

The microimplications that are linked to the fact of the pregnant belly point to a fundamental problem of self-determination. By being made to mean pregnant in a certain sense by the microimplications of co-workers, Sara is effectively not able to *not* signify pregnancy. She does not determine the meaning of her pregnancy; it has become a social signification. The fact that the meaning ascribed to her as a PhD student is intersubjective is not the issue. The issue is how the implied meaning is acted upon and the short- and long-term effects these carry. Will she, for example, be left out of the Outlook calendar invitation to the next project meeting? During the workshop Sara spontaneously shared a third memory story about one such instance of 'benevolent discrimination' (e.g., Hebl, King, Glick, Singletary, & Kazama, 2007; Romani, Holck, & Risberg, 2018), where presumptions about the fact of the pregnant belly resulted in her being excluded from a meeting – as if she were already on parental leave. Will she be treated as more of a body to take care of than as a skilled mind to interact with? In other words, will she be sidelined, not out of her own actions, decisions and wishes, but by the actions of others based on what they think she means, needs and wants as a pregnant woman?

Strategic dichotomies

There are several semiotic dichotomies emerging from the memory stories: personal/professional, private/professional, body/brain, old/new, familiarity/strangeness, senior/junior, inclusion/exclusion and recognising/ignoring. The point to using the concept of microimplication is to draw attention to how these dichotomies come to be actualised when they inform people's concrete actions. They are not just analytical distinctions (which they certainly also are); they are practical distinctions effectively made by the members of the situation. The sign that organises these various practical distinctions is the visibly pregnant body, the fact of the belly. Sara is effectively interacted with as a junior, as a personal and private person; she is ignored as a professional mind but recognised as a physical body. The opening paragraphs in Memory story 1 spell out the emotional labour (see, e.g., Ashfort & Kreiner, 2002; Coupland, Brown, Daniels, & Humphreys, 2008; Hochschild, 1983) that goes into hiding the fact of the belly in order for Sara's body not to come to the fore at the expense of her brain. And, similarly, her strategy of asking questions to avoid inquiries about her body. Sara's pregnant body is taken as an open invitation for commenting on her body in ways that otherwise seem inappropriate to most people, especially in a work context. Perhaps it, for that reason, is no coincidence that both memory stories are situated in an informal lunch setting.

This text builds on an individual experience, expanded into a collective biography where the affective dimensions of

microimplications are in focus. Our intention is not to generalise this experience as a universal conclusion or explanation of the experience of being pregnant as a PhD student in academia. Nor do we regard this as a stand-alone experience locally produced in the specific academic setting. In this final part, we bring back attention to what happens to bodies entering into an academia not shaped by nor for them. Bodies and subjectivity are traditionally seen as problematic in an academia where logic and objectivity are incontestably held in highest regard as good research practice, shaping the academic culture. Although more and more embodied alternatives are emerging in academia (our piece of writing is just one example of many – see, e.g., Gilmore, Harding, Helin, and Pullen [2019] special issue of *Management Learning* on writing differently), the embodied accounts are just drops in a sea of conventional research norms, cherishing objectivity, distanced/neutral positioning and logic detached from emotion.

The mainstream research norm is objective and disembodied, but the actual university, we contest, is very much embodied. In the concrete setting of the two memory stories, academic embodiment is male (and heteronormative), the type of body suitable for academic work. The standardisation and homogeneity of this particular embodiment universalise the male body, rendering it invisible in an academic context. A body that temporarily (such as a pregnant belly) or constantly does not conform to the embodiment that is academia becomes a visibly present body because it differs from the academic embodiment. It pokes and challenges the traditional academic culture simply by being. In Ahmed's (2012) words, we may say that Sara's pregnant, non-conforming body inhabits an institutional space that does not give her residence. This involuntary being-out-of-place or not-at-home animates resistance to the pregnant body in the androcentric academic department. People act and react to the very present body – the fact of the belly, leaving little or no room for that body to define and act on its own behalf, a process we have described by using the concept of microimplications. From the memory stories we know that people use different strategies to handle a very present body, like the pregnant belly. Individuals with embodied experiences of pregnancy might see it as an opportunity to exchange experiences or a point of connection. Others, with no physical experience of being pregnant, might use jokes and witty comments to cope with the fact of the belly. Although the strategies are different, they have at least one thing in common: the fact of the belly merges the private sphere with the professional, and by that forecloses opportunities for the pregnant PhD student to act as an academic subject that can engage in and hence live the PhD journey.

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Entangled in Scholarly Institutionalising – The Travails of the 'Mature Age' PhD Student

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> Today's society is no longer Foucault's disciplinary world of hospitals, madhouses, prisons, barracks, and factories. It has long been replaced by another regime, namely a society of fitness studios, office towers, banks, airports, shopping malls, and genetic laboratories. Twenty-first-century society is no longer a disciplinary society, but rather an achievement society. Also, its inhabitants are no longer 'obedience-subjects' but 'achievement-subjects'. They are entrepreneurs of themselves. (Han, 2015, p. 8)

When I was asked to contribute a piece to the Unplugged section of *M@n@gement*, I did not think that I would write about what follows. But as I wait the approval of an extension to my PhD, I am contending with what it means to be a 'mature age' student entangled in the institutional affordances and constraints of the situation I find myself in.

Last week, I was chatting with 'Krista', a peer PhD student, while waiting for my youngest daughter to turn up for lunch. We are both in Politics and International Relations, and she, like me, is a 'mature age' student, coming to the end of her time as a doctoral student. We randomly grab moments in corridors, kitchens and outside buildings to chat and compare our experiences and frustrations with what feels like an infantilising of our position as doctoral students, women who have substantive and extensive professional experience outside academia (in the institutions of the public sector). As we stood outside the library, my daughter turned up at the point we were moaning about the impact of doing a PhD on our sense of embodied selves – the institutionalising practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 2000; Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011) that we feel have deconstructed who we are and that are affecting our bodies in the form of loss of confidence, anxiety and even joint pain. My daughter quipped about how relieved she was to not have to go a class or write assessments, having just come out of 19 years of educational institutionalisation – she graduated last week with an honours degree in Biochemistry from another university. In response, we described what happens when you hand in the printed copy of your thesis in our esteemed seat of learning – you literally get a lollipop – admittedly quite a large piece of candy with the university logo impressed in it and you get to pick from two flavours. We suggested that after all the intellectual, physical and emotional labour accompanying the production of a thesis, a lollipop for women of our age was

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an insufficient symbolic recognition of our efforts. We appreciate the apprentice-like aspects of undertaking a PhD (Raineri, 2013), but handing out lollipops seems at odds with transitioning from being an apprentice to a journeywoman scholar. So what have I learnt about the institutional activities associated with performing 'doctorateness' before finishing? What is the elusive mix of qualities required of me in the course of acquiring doctorateness, things like, 'intellectual quality and confidence, independence of thinking, enthusiasm and commitment, ability to adapt to changing circumstances and opportunities' (Denicolo & Park, 2013, p. 193).

Elements of the work entailed in the doing of a PhD embody a range of institutionalising doings (Yazdani & Shokooh, 2018). In the course of becoming enrolled in scholarly-ness, I have felt at times that these activities echo the performance management practices I had been immersed in as a public servant and what I observed in my ethnographic fieldwork with local government and National Health Service (NHS) managers in Scotland. My university's 'quirky' celebratory reward from the administrative processes associated with the submission of a PhD, materialised in childlike condensed carbohydrate on a stick, seems like an appropriate point of departure to reflect on features of institutionalising I have encountered, been enveloped in and begun to embody. I want to sketch, how, as part of the doctoral process; threads and fleeting connections of practices with isomorphic tendencies have repeated through life, in my professional experiences and my conversations with managers in my doctoral fieldwork. I also reveal as I have passed the 50 age mark, how these reproductions are generating a weariness and a newly felt cynicism, that at this time has generated unease about where these feelings will take me as I creep closer to the finishing line.

However, before I go any further, I need to be explicit that I do not want to convey that these reactions are a totalising, or reduction, of my doctoral journey. I have wanted to do a PhD since my, now a scientist, daughter was a baby, and so I have loved having the time and space to satiate my inquisitive disposition, to read profusely, deliberate on my professional life worlds and discover the joys of ethnographic writing – the personal delights of what seems like spatiotemporal excess in a time that appears unable to afford this – so let me provide some context.

When embarking on this PhD undertaking, my initial application was informed, in part, by a desire to make sense of my own experiences of, and curiosities about, collaborative working as a public sector manager. My biography has been shaped by environmental science studies, activism and formative participation in feminist collective organisations – anti-institutional configurations – where debates about power dynamics were everyday work, as part of wider movements engaged in challenging traditional hierarchies to advocate for shared power structures. The immersion in my late adolescence into collectivity has had a lasting legacy in the normative values I enacted. However, given subsequent employment experiences, I could also be seen to be marked by the discursive manoeuvrings of new public management and new public governance (Hood, 1991; Osborne, 2006) and managerial preoccupations with performance management, in my journey through the third sector, adult education, local government, state government and the NHS in Scotland and Australia. Additionally, as a 'non-professional' public servant in professional public sector contexts, I have observed and experienced the consequences of not belonging to a profession, as well as the dynamics between professions (e.g. social workers and clinical psychologists in disability services, youth workers and teachers in educational settings), and wondered about the effects of, what I thought were, institutionalising, professional 'blinkers' in how people worked together. I have also been an actor in collaborative efforts to tackle intractable issues, or working in 'the swamp', as Schall (1995) describes it, and the inertia (Huxham, 2005) that seemed to frequently emerge. On arriving in Scotland in 2008 from Australia, I was immediately struck by what I described as the dense partnership landscape in the public sector and attendant performance management frameworks (Ferry & Scarparo, 2015) – an institutionalising of inter-organisational relations. This moment, in reaction to my experiences to that date, was the trigger for an idea for a PhD. Nonetheless, what might seem self-contradictory, given my interest in matters of collaborative performance, which informed my research questions, I relished the opportunity to escape the performance trap (Franco-Santos & Otley, 2018) and have the time to explore matters in detail.

Accordingly, when it came to my doctoral research I was one and the same time an 'outsider' and an 'insider', having had professional and managerial experiences in the particular domains of the public sector I was studying, doing ethnography in the public sector. Sayer (1992) argues that it is not possible for the researcher to stand outside the research and indeed, whilst I did not have any direct work history with the actors involved in the research, I brought my background, values and interpretations to the work of ethnographic research, the experience of an ex-public servant (turned novice ethnographer), who felt her way through inter-organisational ethnography, with a group of managers implementing a mandated collaboration.

So I want to draw out here three threads which I think have travelled through my doctoral experiences that seem to me to tie with and tie me to the doings of a PhD in a Russell Group University in the United Kingdom – institutionalising patterns that have both surprised and disappointed me. These threads are awkward, untidy and unfinished as I am still immersed in both sense-making about and concluding the processes of the PhD and what is playing out in my body at present.

Thread 1 – the consequences of my performance/performative management enactments as a public servant.

Thread 2 – the performance/performative management work of the managers I shadowed in my ethnography.

Thread 3 – the performance/performative management practices that have become entangled in the doings of a doctorate prior to completion.

Thread 1

At the risk of embarrassing myself publically, I want to share what could be regarded as a 'cringe-worthy' extract from my pre-PhD curriculum vitae, the bit called 'personal profile' that I first developed and then adapted from 2008 to 2013 – a representation of my performance-based identity perhaps.

> An energetic, motivated and highly dynamic Manager with strong strategic and communication skills and extensive hands-on experience initiating and building strong partnerships with success in developing and delivering key social, health and care services within a range of settings and with diverse groups.
>
> More than 20 years' of experience in planning, delivery, management and evaluation of national, state and local programmes (including aged and disability care, suicide prevention, domestic violence, mental health, public health, housing, homelessness and youth services) in the public, private and non-government sectors in Australia, United Kingdom and internationally. Wide-ranging experience in operating in environments of complexity and uncertainty and in the context of collaboration.
>
> Expert in outcomes (results) planning and evaluation, change management, service development, policy analysis & training. Specialist in planning, implementing and evaluating evidence-informed interventions, programmes and policies and advice for organisations working in a results-based management environment. Significant experience in the design and facilitation of brain-friendly learning in planning and evaluation approaches, including contribution analysis/outcomes, planning/results-based management in the context of complexity, partnership working and tackling 'wicked issues'. Substantive practice experience in working with diverse groups across urban and rural contexts, including, older people and people with disabilities, survivors of family violence, people with substance abuse and/or mental health issues and vulnerable adults. Chairperson of the Board of Edinburgh Women's Aid, with long-standing involvement in the goveranance of charities.
>
> Ability to adapt quickly and efficiently to working environment. Exceptional interpersonal skills and capacity to learn new skills quickly and apply them successfully. An innovative, loyal, and results-orientated professional, with strong facilitation, community development and interpersonal skills, and proven ability to surpass goals.

Over this period, I had four jobs, and performance management dimensions were routinised features in them all. I was involved in reporting on performance, evaluating performance, training on performance and authoring resources for performance for intra- and inter-organisational purposes. Whilst I have always thought of myself as having a critical stance, a commitment to the qualitative and the narrative, when I look back, I shudder. It reads as a performance, a theatrical act for seeking a part in an organisation – a partial, performative representation. What the extract also does not show is that this text was co-created in conjunction with a UK recruitment advisor, whose 'expertise' I sought to translate my professional experience when I moved from Australia. It also unsurprisingly does not reveal the accumulated, embodied consequences over the course of my career roles, where I sought increasingly senior positions enmeshed in institutionalised performance management – asthma, arrhythmia and anxiety.

Thread 2

As I got to know the managers I was shadowing in the course of my fieldwork, it became apparent that the two longest serving managers in the team had had some problems with their health and that the situation they found themselves in was fraught. The pressures and consequences of NHS performance management in the UK have been well documented (Dickinson, 2014), and having worked in the NHS, I was familiar with the performance management frameworks in use in Scotland. Nevertheless, seeing at close quarters what these actors were undergoing not only reminded me of my own experiences, but revealed the personal impacts of being responsible for the performance of various services in a context of accelerated action.

> … [W]hat's interesting is the NHS has moved quite significantly into measuring things in real time and they're evaluating in real-time, adjusting and making changes accordingly and having to account, at the most, you know, with a time-lag of weeks or months, for some activities and this basically against very clear performance standards and targets within the HEAT framework for Scotland Performs, that we have to report on. … to be honest I'm running out of steam, it's just getting really, really, more and more difficult, instead of easier. You would think that with more experience, you'd be more sanguine about it. … But I believe in the concept of what we're trying to do, I just have 'mebbe' a little bit of cynicism about the way they're going to do and whether some of the kinda protectionism, game playing, hopefully only slows it up, but doesn't prevent it. But I could see someone like [the chief officer] being pissed off and going why would I keep going, seriously, so I'm trying not to be cynical about it and in the future might hold a change of personnel because that's what happens. ('Stuart', 6 June 2016)
>
> [T]he last five years, really I think the kinda pace of everything in the NHS has just dramatically changed, you know, to the point where we're needing to justify things with a level of data which is, in the moment, you know, it's not about sort of doing a bit of a retrospective, how have things been over the last 12 months and reporting it. We're talking about, you know, reporting things within the month, or within the week or within the day, it's the performance targets … which needs to be fed up nationally, so in times of dips in performance, like we've had a really, shoddy couple

> of weeks from our emergency access standard performance, to the point where, we've not quite got the kind of, Scottish Government coming in with their task team to sort the problem out, but we are having to report them on a 30-minute basis … it's not just managing those expectations internally, because you've got to manage our teams and kind of try and not completely protect them from that, but you have to work with different people differently, don't you and when you've got a team of people, who you want to be productive and well and enjoy their work and all those sort of things, and you've got us at this level, with, soaking up some of the pressure from the executive team, managing the expectations and challenges that the staff have on the ground and trying to handle all of that, in very different ways, …. I think that's, that is a massive problem for us I would say. We are working in the moment, we are reacting to the day's operational crisis and not giving ourselves enough time to think about what we need to do to fix that, to stop that stuff. … If I had a clone I would ask them to deal with all of the reactive, in-the-day stuff and allow me to get some time to try get up stream a bit, so we could fix it. … the motivation or the imperative to get something done, is driven by something probably more reputational, than necessarily outcome focused. And so depending upon the authenticity and how genuine your senior leaders are, how much they really care about making a difference, to their local population or whether they're actually they're just doing a job, because it's well paid and they like the buzz of it, depending on that, the completion of documentation and the 'being seen to be being collaborative' to satisfy an internal audit report, is probably more of a motivator, for some, than for others, so, and people will be very good at just kind of … and no disrespect to chief execs, cos I know they've got massive amounts work on their plate and they're spinning so many different things, it must be a horrible place to be at times and so much of it probably is, kind of, presentational and can't possibly be genuine or authentic for some people, but I'm pretty sure that reputationally, that is probably a big issue for our local systems, we will want to be doing something that presentationally, looks like, it's the right thing to do. I'm a real cynic it's terrible. I know that, absolutely, in fact, if the kids weren't probably as young as they were, I'd probably, be actively, looking to go somewhere else [laughs] … you know it really is difficult. ('Samuel', 6 June 2016)

The temporal rhythms of the performance management that Stuart and Samuel talked about, I felt, were, in part, attempts to know more and more, at increasing frequency, in minutiae and producing heightened responses on the part of managers (Ylijoki, 2016). This effort had become a taken-for-granted feature of demanding daily work, a ceaselessness of having to get more and more done, a centripetal acceleration that shapes organising. This modus operandi from acute health settings penetrated activities beyond the hospital, even when the manager occupied a non-acute role. Similarly, the language used in the hospital for daily work expressed hurriedness, a squeeze on time, with words like, 'huddle', 'safety brief', 'surge capacity' and 'discharge flow', part of everyday vernacular. Despite the distance, the geographical separation from government, the extractive forces of performance appeared to pull effort towards the centre, as managers and many others danced to the demands of an acute systems orientation that felt as though it was reaching a breaking point. Resources were being stretched, but managers worked to ensure that appearances were maintained, the semblance of control and the authoritativeness of interventions pervaded everyday workings. However, as one of the strategic planners expressed to me:

> I think there's a real risk in 'Kintra', because it's very busy, and the numbers of people are small that either, one, something gets missed, or people just get totally burned out, because they're trying to … well they have to be really busy because they're busy doing all the stuff they need to do … ('Sharon', 21 June 2016)

These managers had paid a price in the relentlessness of the work of the NHS, a marriage broke down, both of them, in the previous 12 months, had taken lengthy sick leave to recover from work-related stress, and less than a year from my exit from the field, they had left the organisation and the area. After spending time with these managers, despite my long-standing involvement and ongoing interests in the fields of care work and public management, I thought I could never do these kinds of jobs again. I am not prepared anymore to pay the performative toll.

Thread 3

Just over 2 years ago, about 6 months after I finished fieldwork, immersed in transcribing and analysing my data, I was told that my father's health was in a parlous state. I returned to Australia to get a rapid lesson in the state of aged care in rural, regional Queensland and to say goodbye to my Dad before he passed away. On this rushed, emotion-filled visit, I also spent time with my mother in the capital city of Queensland, and given my previous work roles, I quickly realised something was wrong with her, something I now know is vascular dementia. These life events that I frankly was not prepared for (even with my background) immersed as they were in matters of care for older people, are not far from the topic of my thesis. What has felt like a strange, serendipitous, personal and academic collision in the midst of an ethnography of care organising has not been lost on me. However, whilst these events were significant, I did not feel I could take time out of the PhD, I needed to press on regardless. In hindsight this was not the wisest decision, but in the meantime what has become clear is that another life event is taking place in my own body – menopause – another matter I gave little thought to until its unfolding symptoms have begun to drain me as I try to crawl to the end of the thesis.

Over time, performative logics have encroached and nested themselves in my work, and whilst I thought I might escape them by trying a career shift into academia, it appears that now even doctorateness has incorporated the institutionalising mimicry of the discourses in new public management, or what some refer to as the 'neo-liberal' university (Kelly, 2016). I first

became aware of this, when attending conferences and doctoral workshops where I learnt about the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) and having to consider how to make our work REF-able (McCulloch, 2017). Having previously worked as an evaluator, I was shocked to see the lack of evaluative sophistication and criticality in how this UK higher education governance process was being discussed. There have been lengthy debates in the worlds of evaluation (often outside of academia) going back over 10 years about performance management, the value of evaluation and the methodological challenges associated with measuring impact (Nielsen & Ejler, 2008).

Adding to this is my awareness that before I even hand in the thesis, I am expected to be working towards publishing journal papers, possibly book chapters, as well as capture any activity that might be useful to enhance my CV. All this effort for the ambitious target to become a '4 × 4', a term I first heard at a management conference 3 years ago, which I initially thought was a reference to a large vehicle, or a block of wood. This goal of publishing four papers in four star journals was revelatory, given that I did not understand the significance of the star ratings of journals. At the same conference, another academic showed me their ready reckoner of journals that laid out all the star ratings from 4 to 1. I was told I needed to familiarise myself with these journals, with the aim of getting published in the 4-star ones. As a political science student who interlopes in academic management and organisational studies events I was shocked, how was I supposed to do that? But now I see this individualised effort coupled with the wider research performance efforts of the university in the REF, and how the impact of individual academic's work is being conceptualised and appropriated for evidencing institutional research quality. Needless to say I have not yet even written any journal articles.

Twisted threads

As I edit the final chapters of my thesis, my body is not cooperating, asthma has gripped me now for over 6 months, and menopause is revealing the ageing of my body in ways I do not want to acknowledge. So is it menopause that is actually making this whole PhD endeavour complicated, or have institutionalising practices enrolled me into particular ways of performing doctorateness that are just exhausting? At this stage, I think it is an entangling of a menopausal body with these practices that is engendering dissonance and feelings of doubt and weariness. Why should I bother? I had not appreciated the precariousness and the performative work in higher education, and now I am not sure what to do next. But then again, the outcome is unknown and so is the embodied price to pay, but as of today, as a menopausal body, I feel too tired to contemplate a life as a middle-aged 'early-career' scholar. BUT, I am not yet prepared to give up, I am keeping hold of why I wanted to do a PhD and that this is a decade-long personal aspiration no matter what comes after. And so, in my own small way and despite the travails, I am endeavouring to enact resistance through the troubling of the writing conventions of the thesis itself, an 'against the grain', personal attempt to embody a different way of doing ethnographic writing as doctorateness (Weatherall, 2018). Whether it matters is the fact that remains to be seen.

> There are always interstitial, residual, marginal, irrelevant, recalcitrant and plain contradictory elements that escape any attempt to identify, govern, and stabilize a given … arrangement. (Jessop, 2004, p. 163)

> These documents can delude. But more than this they constitute part of a "turn-of-the-century international language of good governance" (Strathern, 2006, p. 195), the style of which, the ubiquitous bullet point for example, is non-transformative. These documents are not open to intellectual operations. "They allow no growth. They create no knowledge" (Strathern, 2006: 196; Hunter, 2008, p. 510)

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Queering the PhD Journey: An Autoethnographical Discussion of 'Fit'

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Fit

> 'Have you always been a sort of … square peg in a round hole?' I'm asked earnestly by a fellow PhD candidate in the Management Discipline one morning. I'm waiting to step into a supervisor meeting, engaging in a little social chitchat with other students working in our open-plan space. I've been sharing my mid-year plan to travel home to the country town where I have family, friends, dogs. The mental struggle to place me in a rural environment must be equal to the labour of forcing a square peg into just such a round hole. I take my square-peg status into my meeting, sharing it laughingly with my supervisors as we settle in to discuss the latest draft of my literature review. I've taken no offense – perhaps I'm even sparkling a little bit with pride in my perceived difference – maybe square is a complimentary shape of peg to be.

In the pursuit of new knowledge, I as a PhD candidate seek to contribute unique work to the Critical Entrepreneurship Studies field, to establish myself in academia as a researcher, as an expert. It is a privilege to be here, which is not to say I did not work hard for this opportunity. The PhD journey is built upon a many-layered history that gives us a place to stand and begin from, over and over, in footsteps of many, many others.

This journey is shaped by a clearly stated required outcome. Regular hurdles, boxes to tick. It is around this structure that we as students congregate – a common ground and a shared focus. Our roughest edges are worked off with coursework designed to bring us up to speed with approaches to critical reading and writing, to flex a stronger grasp on our methodological approach – to develop an ability to explain ontology, epistemology. We learn ways to fit, to be fit for purpose. Some things are backwards; we know what we're meant to know, the level we'll be working to in 3 years, but we have to learn by doing. We're aiming for an end point, and we expect to arrive somewhere if we've done it right, but we're drawing our own maps.

I am a square peg in a round hole. I watch others in the Management Discipline thrive on moments of fit; lightbulb moments explained in language that is newly learnt, shiny, fresh out of the box. These are colleagues, and I am pleased to witness the satisfaction and confidence at their fingertips. They slip into this language, it shapes them. They flex outwards and then settle into knowing.

I speak with a friend over lunch on Sydney's hottest day so far – it is 36°C and still only spring. The warmth sets the tempo of our conversation. We reflect, return and revisit pieces of past conversations, think aloud, double back to correct and revise ourselves. I take comfort in her companionship; my thoughts are often half-formed, unfinished, uncertain – the space left around these doesn't prohibit connection or understanding.

She asks me what I learned, undertaking my coursework – the semester has almost finished. I take my time before explaining that I understand now that there are places I do not have to belong and will not fit. My own strength comes in the other times, when my classmates are reduced to something

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like panic as they grapple with theory and language. They visit the sense of not fitting, while I live there. I breathe it in as reassurance, a familiar friend.

In my first year, I regularly come unstuck in coursework classes discussing theoretical approaches that have 'the nod' from our discipline – the more I learn about other ways of thinking, the less accessible certainty becomes.

The PhD journey

This 'unsticking' often feels like it is meant to be a cause of panic. It seems a failure of sorts, to be adrift in such significant concepts, theories and approaches. I read clearly on the faces of other members of the class the unease caused by confusion with new ideas. My classmates mutter shared gripes with each other, fuelled by this panic, a façade of ontological stability shaken in the face of such a challenge (Rumens, 2018).

I know so little. I know less than I did when we started here. I don't know enough to do this. I know nothing.

By the end of a day of theory, my brain is packed full of the flecks and fragments that sparked recognition, interest, a new idea. I understand that this is exactly what this class is for, and as I travel by train from university to home, I work through that same confusion expressed by classmates. I don't know anything; nothing I think or have thought is going to work for a legitimate project. Everyone else knows more, has more planned, has grounded themselves in reality in a way that our supervisors and assessors will recognise immediately as the Real Deal, whereas I am bringing some half-formed, barely flexed concept from a feminist inkling into a legitimate Management Discipline space.

Who am I, exactly, to be taking up this space?

We work up to a presentation of our research project, around the 1 year mark. I double down on what I don't know, and zoom in on it, writing and rewriting and re-rewriting a set of research questions that I am not going to understand the value of until after I have finished the project. I breathe into this not knowing the same way you are meant to take a deep breath as a physiotherapist adjusts muscles and bones – my body is being reshaped by the sort of desk job that makes me wear my stress in my shoulders. As I am writing this, I consciously correct my posture.

Another responsibility – to take care of an unruly body. I commit to 3 years of wrangling a mess of just such unruly thoughts and suspicions into smoothed and rounded sentences, arguments, chapters. My body takes on a cartoon-like quality, with a head large and busy with thoughts; my hands nimble for quick typing, scrolling, scribbling. I wonder where my body fits into a doctoral thesis, a research process entirely concerned with order and outcomes. I am determined to bring my whole self to my fieldwork, to consider my physicality as a researcher, to know how it feels to sit by participants building a social enterprise, to consider where and how I fit as an outsider inside (Weatherall, 2019). I will unavoidably bring this self to my writing, too. We learn the skills calling for us to tidy our researcher lives – to write away the bumpy, rough corners and counterpoints to the theories and practices that will make us right, robust and real. To write ourselves to fit. If I am thinking differently, how might I write differently?

Looking beyond the academy

I am learning to be an activist. I want things to be different. I want liberation for all, from violence of all kinds. Dismantling systemic oppression looks like many things to me – it's the sort of responsibility I want, need and choose to belong to. I want to be radical in the way that means returning to roots (Liu, 2018). I protest, march, argue and make a public point of saying what I believe. I am unlearning the need for things to fit together tidily, in my life, firstly, then in my ways of seeing and knowing – lastly, I work to unlearn it in my writing. But knowing how to be radical in the academy is an exercise in interdisciplinarity – in seeking critical voices from an unruly cacophony of spaces, I look to Black feminist voices, queer voices and disabled activist voices. I commit to a critical practice of intersectionality, a practice of the sort that calls for a centring of marginalised stories (Crenshaw, 1989; Hooks, 1981, 1984). I look to others who know the systems of oppression I am fighting more intimately than me; how else can we know the reach of such systems without hearing from those who have faced them, eye to eye?

My practice of intersectionality owes everything to the activists I hear from every day. I learn newly critical ways of seeing systemic oppression from the articulate, passionate, and sometimes furious sometimes funny folks I keep in my orbit due to social media. Critical reactions to events in the social and political realms happen on my timeline in real time; I learn to see and uncover those systems that were previously shielded by my own privilege. A regular day in the news cycle becomes a testament to imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (Hooks, 1981). Critiques of heteronormativity identify shades of violence from the assumption of norms, to limitation of rights, to denial of humanity and to loss of life.

I learn by watching others perform activism, advocacy and solidarity. The more I witness, the more I learn, and the braver I get. These are the artists, the writers, those working in the non-profit sector. My project is unavoidably shaped by them, and yet there is no place in my carefully curated list of references for me to truly credit their impact for the ways it is felt. We can look to others to inform our way of taking apart the world. Maybe a poem can do it, maybe a song can do it, maybe a Twitter exchange can do it. Lorde calls us to poetry as a site of activism, a tangible way of connecting emotion to action.

"For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence" (Lorde, 2007, p. 37). I observe such poetic defiance in the form of gorgeous dancing queer Black activists on Instagram – truth to power spoken from Aboriginal playwrights and championed by gay Chinese-Australian writers. I fill my ears with queer podcasters critiquing exclusion of trans People of Colour from conversation, and hear the sort of savage, witty takedowns that have me double over with laughter and a thrill of joy and danger, to hear such words spoken aloud. I too am emboldened to speak and write my own verses, to sit witness to spoken word performances eliciting sensory overload. This confirmation is a necessity. Because of this, I continue to exist.

Nobody fits

I understand that this particular journey is an apprenticeship. We hear this often – we're here to learn the skills we'll need to build and make our place in academia. Sometimes this makes it feel as though we could be studying anything – but whenever I observe something to this effect aloud, I am bumped back into place by a reminder that this project makes us an 'expert' in our field, that we're building knowledge where there previously was none. There is a balance, then, between the journey and the destination. Either way, what tries to pass itself off as freedom is a requirement to carve something out of nothing – but it's a very particular piece of nothing, with a shortlist of approved tools for carving. There are giant's shoulders that require standing upon.

I am a square peg in a round hole. There can be a point of pride, even amusement and fun, where a fear of not fitting is meant to be. My evident embrace and enjoyment of difference is a threat and a promise, questioned by other PhD candidates even as it is recognised. Somehow, my presence becomes a reassurance. If I have permission to be here in all my evident difference, asking questions of the theory we have all committed to shaping ourselves to, then any other person seeking to fit, to round their rough edges, can be confident that their chances are better than mine. We are a community drawn together by this particular experience, and yet we are learning how to compare ourselves – to decide on the strengths of others in relation to our own, to understand through a list of vaguely defined criteria who is 'the best' at which parts. We know soon we'll be competing for funding, places on lists, prizes to list on CVs and jobs. A neoliberal institution such as a university dabbles in concepts of collegiality and community, but it is quickly made obvious that these are things we ultimately must make for ourselves if we truly want them. We are invited and expected to shape ourselves – to fit in alongside others in a way that means our work can be kept separate. Still, stand-alone careers are built on collaborative projects and papers. I have got a wish list of co-authors.

The PhD journey is a beginner's guide to a world of competition we are going to be part of for the rest of our careers if we stay in academia. I am not meant to say it out loud, I know that. There is a pretence of protection from the harsh realities of the academy, but we all know, told by supervisors and senior staff, how things work. With this is the implication, always, of the value of fitting in. If I am to be a square peg, I should at least imply that I would like to be a round one. It should be made explicit that I am willing to fit, as best I can. Instead, I find myself in pleasant rounds of self-interrogation during weekly reflections on my project:

How was I an activist today?

Does my fondness for messiness make me an enemy of academia?

*I've already spent so much time on this work – the reading and writing about the crushing structures of oppression we're all chipping away at. Sometimes we're chipping carefully – a *tap tap* with a chisel made of arms and hands. Sometimes it's a huge hammer that doesn't land. Sometimes I think maybe we're doing the work of a river, wearing slowly and stubbornly until we're in a valley.*

I learn, as I go, to temper expressing my comfortability with not knowing. To keep quiet in particular spaces. I muse aloud that I'm still working out which theory is going to be the right theory for my work, and a slightly concerned fellow candidate takes it upon themselves to sit down beside me, help me work this out, as if we are not constantly shifting through this process. As if we are not all uncertain, fluid and able to be revised over and over (Adams & Jones, 2011). Speaking uncertainty, a tone with a question to it, a laugh at the periphery of it – again my physical body betrays the ways in which I cannot fit. I am losing my grasp on this metaphor, or it is losing its grasp on me.

I learn by unlearning

As a queer student working on a critical project grounded in intersectionality, perhaps I am not a typical management discipline PhD candidate. I am constantly shifting the language of my project to explain it to those outside my field; I end up using words I am working consciously against just for ease of description. When I say I'm examining diversity in start-up companies, this is acceptable as a noble goal. Perhaps some sense can then be made of my clearly feminist wry commentary; does it explain my short hair, tattooed arms, band t-shirt and button-downs; the pile of books by Hooks (1984), Ahmed (2006), Moraga and Anzaldua (1983) on my desk? When I work to explain that I am curious about ways in which to examine interlocking systems of oppression, the tensions between empowerment and negotiation, I am increasingly foreign to much of the crowd. A senior academic calls my project 'brave' at a conference after I deliver a paper, and I know this is not a compliment. A squarer and squarer peg.

Finding a place for queer theory in critical entrepreneurship studies might be simple – after all, there are very few papers to work through for my literature review. I guess we call this the much desired research gap, but to me it feels like the sort of gap that could swallow me whole, squared edges or no. The round hole becomes larger and larger; I am pushed ever outwards. In contemplating just how I might queer my project, from theory to methodology to findings, I seek broader considerations of queering within organisational studies. Rumens (2018) offers me something of this feeling of being seen and understood I find often in queer work; he offers his own pursuit of 'queer' as an intellectual and political practice of resisting the 'regimes of the normal' – the normal, we assume, a rounded shape. He explains that traditional research calls for loyalty to convention or discipline; queer methodologies are by their nature disloyal, the way queer theory is disloyal, to binaries, hierarchies, concrete definitions built on norms and assumptions (Rumens 2018).

I grapple with queering my project as I grapple with being queer in a discipline historically adverse to considering other ways of living, loving, seeing, being and working. Embodied, unstable, messy ways. I am learning my way around the ideas and the ways of speaking that are called for and appropriate to adhere to as an apprentice. Critical theory. Social constructionist. Post-structuralist. Dialectical. I say 'adverse to' and 'appropriate'; challenging this (white) gentleman's agreement to respect an academy built on hundreds of years of understanding the right way to be and do is so foreign as to be implicitly discouraged, rather than viewed as any real threat. What would they say if they knew my critical voice and my academic agenda are fuelled by this disloyalty to hierarchy? How might I belong somewhere I am not backing continued success for? Is there some other way to fit?

Queering the PhD journey, like queering my research, starts with a particular way of seeing systemic shaping of processes and ends up, as always, about structures of power. I seek approaches founded on challenge and disruption that concede that they are works-in-progress, working to be flexible and mobile (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013). "We have come to realise that we are not alone in our struggles nor separate nor autonomous but that we – white black straight queer female male – are connected and interdependent" (Bambara, 1983, p. 1). If we are connected, what lies between? What lies beyond? What can we make of this, from this?

We build skills that become passages of access to legitimacy. We seek even the slightest of footholds in a smoothed, rounded surface. I place my feet atop the steps of many others. Sturdy places to step, if not a place to rest. A place to make a mark, a signal – this way. This way has been traversed by other academics disloyal to categories, to fit, to process. I too work to allow for the messiness of my chosen field, and refuse to abandon work because it is complicated (Crenshaw, 2017).

A different journey

Queerness is a constant and inescapable dialogue I hold with and within myself. Queerness is seeing that the norms we have all learnt and that shape our day-to-day lives are flawed and full of contradictions. For me, right now, to be queer is to be unsurprised by a failure of a system that promises to work for us. To allow us to believe that we might fit. To be resolved to constant negotiation of power dynamics in the research process (McDonald, 2013). Queerness is squareness coming face to face with roundness.

This PhD journey does not have a beginning or an end. It began for me years before I sat at this desk, when I first began to write and revel in the power of words on pages. It will not end at submission, or graduation. Some parts will weave their way into my work for years and years to come. As researchers, we might do better to accept and believe that we are always in the middle, and can only know from there (Ashcraft, 2018).

We are speed-reading; handing in imperfect papers and applying for conferences with abstracts that do not have our full confidence.

I learn the rules as I go, like learning a language that will help me get from place to place. There is room to move – ways to abandon absolute squareness in favour of fuzzy edges from which unexpected things might emerge to be known (Ashcraft, 2018). I am growing to realise that the powerful knowledge I can hold in the face of uncertainty is an understanding of how fluid and malleable my research is and will be. I have membership in the ongoing, collective project of unlearning and relearning.

I do not fit. Sometimes that is the only thing I know for sure. I hold into it until I can find ground under my feet to step back into my earnest analysis – the critical stance I still find difficult to say aloud in places where many systems of oppression live and demand particular performances from my brain, my hands and my body. I push back; I try my best to know and interrogate myself as a researcher working on constantly shifting ground. I am a square peg in a round hole, intrigued by the points of connection and the spaces between.

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