

CREATIVE COLLISIONS:

INQUIRING INTO THE CRITICAL INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN
CREATIVITY & DOCTORAL WRITING

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So what about creativity ... ?



**"CREATIVITY REQUIRES THE COURAGE
TO LET GO OF CERTAINTIES."**

Erich Fromm

Framing creativity & creative practices in 'The Academy'

Some theoretical & methodological underpinnings:

- Bakhtin on the dialogic nature of writing (i.e. 1986)
- Bourdieu on field, habitus and cultural capital (i.e. 1992)
- Ivanič & Clark's seminal study of writer identity (1997)
- Paltridge, Starfield & Tardy's review of ethnographic perspectives on academic writing (2016)
- Starke-Meyerring, Paré, Sun & El-Bezre's work probing institutional discourses (2014)

Creativity and the doctoral thesis . . .

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How is creativity perceived and utilised by thesis writers? Do they perceive that they are undertaking a creative process?
- What writing practices do they consider 'creative'?
- To what extent do supervisors, other university staff or peers encourage creativity as writers craft their thesis?
- To what extent do doctoral writers have to struggle against demands for uniformity from the academy / their discipline/s and how risky do they consider this to be?

Outline of Pilot Study

The study - How is creativity perceived and utilised by thesis writers in the Faculty of Arts at UniMelb?

Sources of data

- Doctoral candidates in the Faculty of Arts
- All participants in '*Crafting the Inspiring Thesis*' workshops
- 2 hours per week x 6 weeks (12 hours total) in Sept-Oct 2016
- Follow-up individual interviews in Nov-Dec 2016 (n=11)
- Review of a 'creative' thesis extract chosen by interviewees
- Follow-up 'focus-group' style interviews with multilingual writers (n=4) in May 2017

Meet the participants . . .

Name* <small>*Pseudonyms</small>	Gender	Local /Int.	Stage of cand.	Discipline
Elly	F	Int. (Iran)	Mid	History / Fine Arts
Riccardo	M	Int. (Italy)	Early	Criminology
Yolanda	F	L. (Aust)	End	Philosophy
Noni	F	L. (Aust)	Late	Anthropology
Raymond	M	L. (Aust)	Mid	History
Ana-Maria	F	Int. (Spain)	Early	Languages / Literature
Lisa	F	L. (Aust)	End	Architecture / Cultural Studies
Jacky	F	L. (Aust)	End	Philosophy
Susie	F	L. (Aust)	End	Asia Institute / Politics
Kate	F	L. (Aust)	Mid	Public Policy
Bianca	F	Int. (Italy)	Early	Applied Linguistics

Emergent areas of interest ...

- All respondents perceived creativity as a potentially or actually **significant element** of their thesis and also of the thesis writing process. However, opinions differed as to what exactly creativity meant and how relevant it was to their specific context.
- The presence of a number of significant **enablers** encouraged writers to introduce creativity and creative practices into their Doctoral writing.
- However, **sizable constraints** need to be acknowledged and overcome before creativity can be fully embraced.

Enablers:

Confidence, playfulness & desire for originality/newness

Yolanda

Creativity gives you a degree of independence over your work. [It] helps you become less fretful & more confident about your work. Being creative is being able to countenance with the thought that your work may upset somebody.

Initially, I was just rewriting what theorists were saying but now I'm comfortable with my material. As confidence grows, you start becoming more playful.

Jacky

Raymond

If you love doing something you will flourish ... That's what drives me – I'm writing something that hasn't been written before. To find & use original primary sources. [Creativity is] using these original materials to create something new ...

Constraints on creativity ...

Elly

It doesn't come for me naturally – it's an internal barrier due to the previous education ... Even this piece rewritten after the class, it's not written like it should ... If I could manage to not censor myself in my writing then I would like it more."

I just want to be clear - creativity is the last thing on my list. I just want to get my ideas across in a readable, coherent way.

Lisa

Bianca

I think they like my writing plain. They want structure; they want the connection from A to B made clear. My Italian soul would like to write long sentences [but] in English it's not acceptable to write long sentences ...

Supervisory and/or disciplinary constraints ...

Riccardo

My Supervisor asked me to be less colourful in my work ... was this a way of stamping on my creativity? I was being too poetic. What is the opposite of colourful? Did he want me to be black & white about it? Did he want me to let go of my creative insights?

I'm concerned that people without particularly creative ideas say them in the right language and that flourishes while the actual creative thinking is not encouraged.

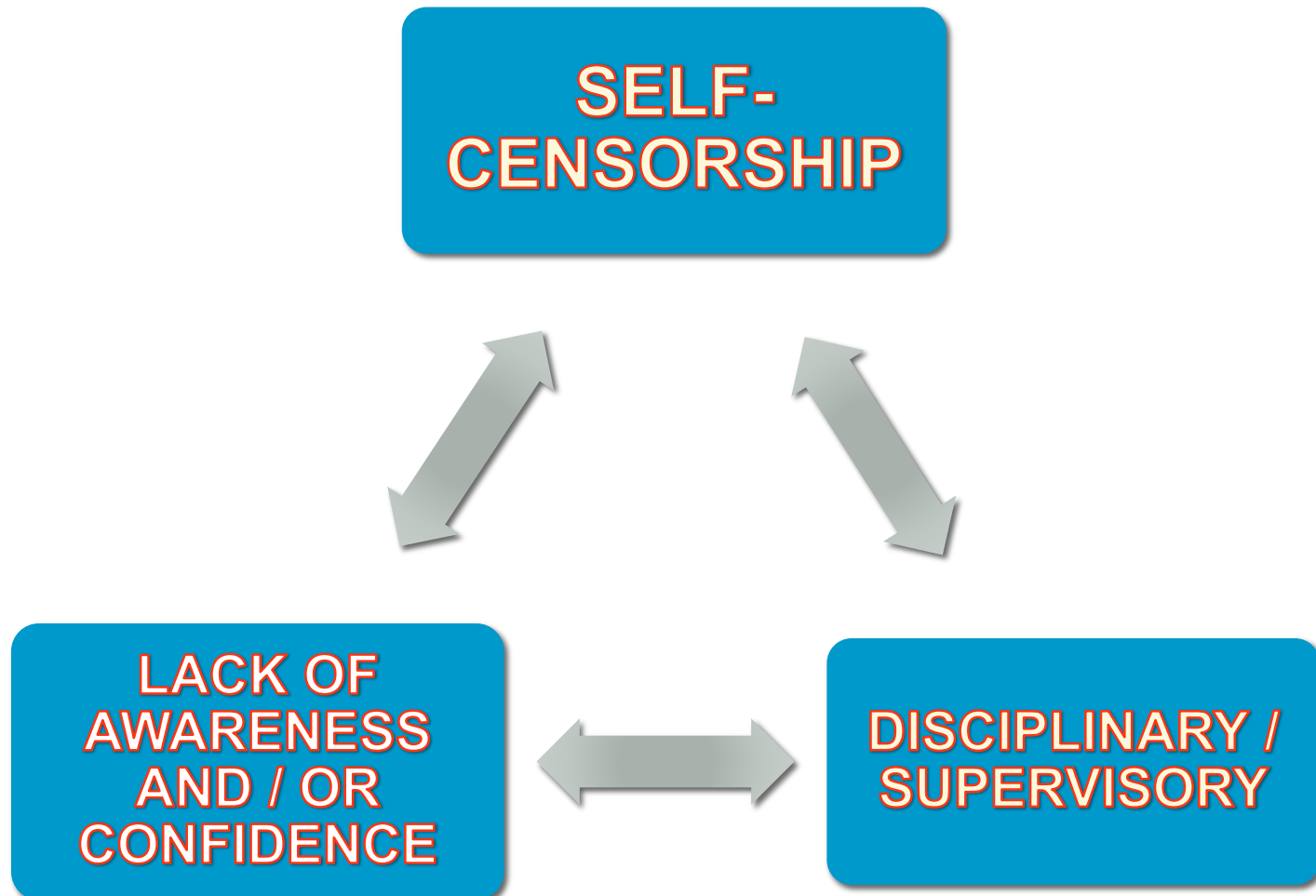
Noni

Yolanda

Academics have no sense of play or playfulness; their work is locked down & defensive. The only thing they're good at is tearing things apart ... [This is] no place for creative inklings / nurturing / fostering.

In summary:

Major constraints on creativity in doctoral writing ...



Some preliminary findings . . .

- 1/** All participants engaged with the notion of creativity in their writing during the writing process. However, for many doctoral candidates, this took the form of an **intense internal struggle** or occasionally, a more **public battle** with their Supervisor
- 2/** The amount and degree of creativity exhibited by thesis writers in their work appears to be affected by **levels of confidence** or **feelings of vulnerability**
- 3/** Creativity can **emerge** at any stage of the thesis writing process, but this group of thesis writers were more aware of it in the beginning stages and especially, during the **final edit**
- 4/** Most participants recognised the potential usefulness of **learning specific techniques** to tap into creativity and creative practices during their candidature.

Creativity and unlearning . . .

A final word from Elly

Every person has some levels of creativity that have been repressed. In the PhD stage ... you can learn, reactivate it ... The class gave me the idea that I can do it [writing creatively] in academic writing ... because before I thought I had to write it in an academic structure and I could not write it as a story.

Elly

The future . . .

- 2 more rounds of workshops & subsequent interviews during late 2017 & 2018
- All going well, plan to submit thesis in 2020 ...

Keep in touch!

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My WordPress site: *Adventures in Paragraphing*

<https://adventuresinparagraphing.wordpress.com>

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