

Chapter 8

It is About Fun Stuff! Thinking About the Writing Process in Different Ways



Megan McPherson and Narelle Lemon

Abstract Publish or perish! Publish or perish! The alarm rings out. The academic under pressure to publish is a significant issue in the contemporary academy because of the constraints of what this productivity means and what this pressure to publish does. Publish or perish is an active force because of its permeation throughout the contemporary academy. But we think this force can be encountered and made into a response, positioning ourselves differently in relation to academic writing. In this chapter, we focus on the notion of making academic writing together as a mindful activity interspersed with moments of creative making. The chapter draws on our reflexive thinking with our writing collaboration for the project *Academics who Tweet* which is an investigation of our, and 34 other academics', practices, identities and use of social media in academia. We are attending to this thinking and writing to show that the force of publish or perish thinking can be mindfully counted through a response of creatively making. We present a case to rethink the approach to academic writing and the ways we creatively construct a response; a response that encompasses making in different ways that sustain collaborations, networks and relations. We argue that in thinking mindfully through and with the process of making academic writing, we are able to transform it into a pattern of generative thinking and writing. We conclude by suggesting that it is the relations we are making that become a way to encounter the force and material of academic writing.

M. McPherson (✉)

Faculty of Education, Monash University, Clayton, Australia
e-mail: megan.mcpherson@monash.edu

N. Lemon

Department of Education, Faculty of Health, Arts and Design, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, VIC, Australia
e-mail: nlemon@swin.edu.au

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8.1 Introduction

Our ethnographic work begins in the midst of socially understanding our way of being in higher education. Although we write on the topic of social media, specifically academics who tweet, we are also observing ourselves outside of this space—across, in between real life and virtually. We are also noticing others. Our investigations into how we negotiate higher education are as Biehl and Locke (2017) illuminate, ‘challenged by the figuring out, disfiguring and refiguring of lifeworks and subjects’ (p. x). We are challenged, from a state of curiosity, by our own becoming but also our collective becoming—we are unfinished, in fact, in a constant state of unfinished as we dis/re-figure out our place and way of being. This also pushes us; it is a motivation and inquiry into how we navigate higher education, how we write together, and how we explore our identity.

Becoming troubles and exceeds as ways of knowing and acting. It pushes us to think against the grain, to consider the uncertain and unexpected in the world and to care for the as-yet-unthought that interrogates history and keeps modes of existence open to improvisation. (Biehl & Locke, 2017, p. x)

Working in higher education does all of this for us. We are aware of this. Aware of others, traditions, assumptions, expectations, boundaries, hierarchy, gentrification, age-ification and things in between. We are self-aware. We are present. We are mindful to our becoming and we are open to being *unfinished* in this space to wonder and ponder the complexities.

What happens when you open up possibilities instead of making judgements when it comes to working together? We found fun! We found a curiosity to explore both ourselves and the research we do together as well as noticing how we work, write, co-write, collaborate, think, problem solve and take time away through our creative practices. We come from this as Gilbert (2015) reinforces with a playfulness and curiosity of creative making. We experiment with the ‘lived tensions between power and flight, morality and vitality, history and invention, creation and ruination, care and disregard, and belonging and fugitivity’ (Biehl & Locke, 2017, p. xi).

We are both multidisciplinary and passionate creatives. We also happen to work in higher education. Megan is an academic, educator, researcher, writer and printmaker while Narelle is an academic, educator, researcher, writer, photographer and crafter. We negotiate within and across academic contexts as academic and educational developer, we also engage with creative practices as a way to mindfully engage with our work, ideas, creative processes, thinking and coping. In this chapter, we use a self-study methodology to contextualise life stories that are lived, told, retold and relived (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). Utilising vignettes of short narratives in a conversational style, we focus on how we use formal and informal mindful practices in how we work individually and collectively. ‘While living and telling often shapes field texts, as we engage in thinking narratively with these lived and told stories in the co-composition of interim and final research texts, the possibilities for retelling and reliving open up’ (Clandinin et al., 2015, para. 20). We reflect on the notion of *unfinished* (Biehl & Locke, 2017), and being forever in process, as we

reflect upon how we approach writing, collaboration, and mindful acts of creativity to support processing of ideas, side projects, how we have learnt to write together and bounce ideas off each other. We support each other through friendship and collegiality although we are viewed as coming from different life cycles in academia by others. We thrive on how our collegiality is a part of our energy, where we can push one another and engage with our identity formation as creative's and individuals who work within higher education.

Narelle: I met Megan in person on my third last day working at a university in 2012. I was just about to take up a senior lectureship at another institution. We had engaged with each other via Twitter and had some of the same colleagues and friends, but we only met each other at a workshop I was invited to deliver on the use of social media in learning and teaching in higher education. Megan live tweeted my presentation which at the time I was very touched by. We went for a coffee post workshop and hit it off like we had known each other for quite some time. Over many cups of coffee and tea we chatted for a few hours about all things social media, working in higher education, and how we engaged with various different creative pursuits to extend our thinking and calm our minds. I was really touched by her way of seeing the world and her ability to deeply consider the intricacies of the environment we were working in as well as enact a multi passionate approach to creative endeavours—writing, printmaking, knitting and crochet. What I just loved was Megan's background in learning and teaching, her Ph.D. topic, and also how she works as a printmaker and artist. I was quite captivated by her ability to still create art work while also undertake her Ph.D. and carry out her commitments within the university space. I found a like-minded soul. Our coffee chat was full of energy and many ideas. It really was the beginning of a lovely friendship and working relationship—it was the start of our *Academics who Tweet* research undertaken together which started with our colleague Kylie Budge but who later left the collaboration due to moving interstate and into a different industry. It was the beginning of what would be, and is, the way we work together; cafe, coffee, tea pots, our laptops, and much insightful conversation about our writing and mindful strategies to navigate the higher education environment.

Megan: I had been watching Narelle's use of Twitter with her creative arts pre-service teachers in the Education faculty and I was fascinated with the ways that the students used Twitter to connect with each other. Her students were taking photos of their work, sharing it with their peers and having conversations. This was not happening from what I could see in the art school I was working in. Art students kept blogs where they showed artwork or had Facebook groups, but I couldn't see or find examples of teachers using Twitter in their classes to support the peer relations and learning. I knew something in this was important. In 2009, I had been discussing with a gold and silversmith student why she blogged her artwork practice. She said quite simply she wanted to join 'her community', the practitioners she admired had blogs, used Twitter and social media and she could see 'her' network that she wanted to be a part of (McPherson, 2015). I could see how Narelle encouraged her students to make a network with other teachers and find resources through these networks, and was I wondering what were the other motivations and dispositions of people using social media in their teaching.

At the time, I was working out the different types of networks I wanted to be connected into. I had been a practicing artist for around 20 years and sessional lecturer for 15 of those years. I had just started a Ph.D. in educational research into studio pedagogies and had started work as a research project manager. Meeting Narelle was a way to start incorporating different ways of doing research, and the ways to make and think through knowledge into the research I already undertook in the creative arts.

In this chapter, we explore how a side project is one way we have fun. This is a way we interrupt the pressures that are present in the measured higher education context. We share insights into our side project, *Academics who Tweet*, and subsequent projects that have come out of this, while also connecting to our interests in social media use as academics and how we mindfully write, work together, use friendship and different spaces to enable us to enact our work. We also utilise our creative practices to explore and support our thinking, time together, and problem solving of our work and careers. Through this, we aim to disrupt the higher education rhetoric of ‘publish or perish’ and the systematic assumptions that come with finding collaborators in a highly competitive environment.

8.2 Literature

In the contemporary higher education climate, there is an underpinning need to meet key performance indicators associated to research outputs and income. Some argue this is to the ‘dearth of quiet contemplative thinking’ (Webster-Wright, 2013, p. 558). This is evident through the ‘publish or perish’ mentality and reflected in many academics’ accounts of their work lives ‘... [as it is] far more common to hear them account for their career narratives in terms of ‘survival’ (Cannizzo, 2017, p. 14) when talking about this approach. The rhetoric of ‘publish or perish’ ignites what Delaney (2009) talks about when describing the concept of academics ‘churning’ through life, where ‘restlessness was the new default speed’ (p. ix), and this churning and restlessness can be seen at play in contemporary academic practice, especially in relation to research and publishing. As Berg and Seeber (2016) bring to the forefront, there is a constant intensification of pressure to produce knowledge, to seek funding for this and to publish and disseminate immediately, quickly and do not forget in high-quality journals.

This is juxtaposed with recent narratives of being a slow academic in relation to honouring thinking time, giving space to the writing process, slowly forming meaningful collaborations, or honouring the ‘slow conversation with these ideas and things’ (Mewburn, 2011, para. 4). If we mindfully look at this, there is a need to be strategic from a place of curiosity, working with emotions to effectively remove the reactionary response. Part of our strategy to observe the ‘publish or perish’ rhetoric is the acknowledgement of re/un-figuring it out (Biehl & Locke, 2017).

We come to our co-writing from a space of curiosity. As Hassad and Chambers (2014) remind us ‘this is what makes mindfulness really work, especially when responding to strong emotional experiences’ (p. 101). As they go onto share:

... the reason for this is that most people tend to think they are relating to their experiences with acceptance and openness, but they are actually fostering a subtle resistance to them. It is tempting to ‘accept’ an emotion in the hope that it will go away ... bringing genuine curiosity to our experience circumvents any resistance: we can’t be genuinely curious about something and at the same time try to get rid of it or ignore it. This is why curiosity is a central part of mindfulness practice. (p. 101)

We are curious and learn through making. As Matthews (2017) reiterates

... it is possible that the things we make deliver messages that other languages or actions cannot clearly express. Colour, texture and shaping express our identities in sublime and subtle ways. Sometimes these messages can inspire life-changing conversations, or reveal something memorable about ourselves. (p. 20)

As we navigate higher education and the ‘publish and perish’ mentality we use making, the act of craft and printmaking to ‘cultivate thoughts and feelings sincerely through the journey’ (Matthews, 2017, p. 25). This is meditative for us. Time manages itself differently. And the making ‘experience is as much about the occupation of mind as it is the working of fingers and the finished fabric’ (Matthews, 2017, p. 27) or artwork. The making process, like mindfulness, ‘offers a great lesson in how to observe ... concentrating on our breathing and deportment, we learn to monitor our thoughts while relaxing at the same time’ (Matthews, 2017, p. 11). We are conscious of the textiles we use, of the feel, of the patterns, of the making and remaking and through this, we allow our ‘feelings [to] flow in and out of our mind’ (Matthews, 2017, p. 56). Making allows us to connect to the Buddhist grouping of the mind that is the five dharma’s: bodily or physical form, feelings, perception, mental functioning and consciousness (Matthews, 2017). Making along with the dharma’s helps us connect to our being, and it allows for the promotion of an attentiveness that helps the slowing down in other parts of life and to savour overlooked occasions and actions (Corbett, 2017; Gauntlett, 2011). From this perspective, we are ‘given the opportunity to reflect, and to make ... thoughts, feelings or experiences manifest and [become] tangible’ (Gauntlett, 2011, p. 4).

And, we also learn through conversation—in person, virtually through social media platforms, email, shared Google Docs and text message and through our writing together and our making. We try something new and we support one another. Through conversation, we move back and forth as we explore our open-endedness of becoming (Biehl & Locke, 2017). Clandinin and Connelly (1998) wrote that

the promise of storytelling emerges when we move beyond regarding a story as a fixed entity and engage in conversations with our stories. The mere telling of a story leaves it as a fixed entity. It is in the inquiry, in our conversations with each other, with texts, with situations, and with other stories that we can come to retelling our stories and to reliving them. (p. 251).

We do this as an ongoing state of collaboration, through a collaborative autoethnographic style of working (Chang, Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2016).

As we write and work together we are in a state of *unfinished*. As Biehl and Locke (2017) remind us ‘unfinishedness is both precondition and product of becoming’ (p. x) and it is through this acknowledgement we investigate continually. We are ‘figuring out, disfiguring, and reconfiguring’ (Biehl & Locke, 2017, p. x) our collaboration, our ideas, our ways of working together, how we write and indeed how we navigate the complexities of expectations in higher education associated to writing and research. We figure it out together through the writing process, through conversation and the act of making. We refigure how we write and how to best do this. As we are doing this, we are mindful of paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment without

being judgmental or too hard on ourselves (Kabat-Zinn, 2016). This is as Richardson (1997) reiterates in *Skirting a pleated text: De-Disciplining' an academic life*:

I believe that writing is both a theoretical and a practical process through which we can (a) reveal epistemological assumptions, (b) discover grounds for questioning received scripts and hegemonic ideals—both those within the academy and those incorporated within ourselves, (c) find ways to change those scripts, (d) connect to others and form community, and (e) nurture our emergent selves. (p. 1)

8.3 Performance

The phrase ‘publish or perish’ is often used to describe the pressure in academia to rapidly and continually publish academic work to sustain or further one’s career. What comes with this phrase is an action to survive in the academy, alongside the valuing of publishing quantity over quality (Back, 2016; Cannizzo, 2017). As Rawat and Meena (2014) have highlighted

the emphasis on publishing has decreased the value of the resulting scholarship as scholars must spend time scrambling to publish whatever they can manage, rather than spending time developing a significant research agenda. The pressure to publish-or-perish also detracts from the time and effort professors can devote to teaching undergraduate and postgraduates. (p. 87)

This is a stress we are aware of.

Narelle: We have fun! We laugh, share all sorts of things about life including personal celebrations and curveballs that allow us to grow. We cry, well I do, and we problem solve together. We ponder, wonder and are curious together. We bond on life inside and outside of the academy. We also consider ways we can reclaim back what makes us excited; what drives us.

Our research on academics who tweet has been a part of this. It’s always been our side project. We call it this fondly. It doesn’t mean it is any different in importance to say Megan’s Ph.D. or research I’m working on with others. But it had been, and still is, a project that brings joy, wonderment, passion and genuine excitement. We need this. We are mindful of needing projects like this, as this is one way we approach and disrupt the discourse in higher education of ‘publish or perish’ in order to survive.

We: Making research and academic identities visible is one of the primary ways we can see researchers using Twitter and social media. Wooing, hooking up and spinning stories are some of the ways we talk about how academics are using Twitter and social media with their research (Budge, Lemon, & McPherson, 2016; Lemon, McPherson, & Budge, 2015; Lemon & McPherson, 2018; McPherson, Budge, & Lemon, 2015; McPherson & Lemon, 2017). We see research relationships forming, work being done on the #acwri discussions (academic writing hash tag on Twitter), we see collaborative publications being celebrated and publicised on Twitter, we see conversations between colleagues discussing research, conferences, sharing resources. We think this is a why using Twitter is important. It makes our research visible and our collaborations tangible and current.

In mid 2013, the three of us got together for a coffee at the State Library of Victoria’s coffee shop. Kylie and Megan knew each other from working in the same office,

and Narelle at the time was based at the same university, but on a different campus. We had been following each other on Twitter, and decided to meet up with an idea to do something together. We decided to work together to think about why we used Twitter as academics. This was something that we were all curious about. We set up the project, *Academics who Tweet* and set out with a narrative inquiry methodology to document how we used social media. In early 2014 we decided to widen the focus of research, developing the project with an ethics application, interviewing protocols and then participant recruitment. In mid 2015 Kylie decided to be less involved in the project as she moved interstate for work. We now still research in this field and have extended to looking at museum education use of social media, and learning and teaching use as well.

Narelle: As we have connected we have had an underpinning inquiry into how we use social media to form a community, to support the work we do, and to remain connected to resources and conversations about both higher education and creative fields. As we talked more, pondered and observed we became increasingly interested in our own practices. We found similarities. We wanted to know what others were experiencing in their practice as well. At the same time, we were also having heavy talks about the pressure to publish, publish, and publish. We saw this as a part of our work but were also questioning the value of this especially around quality. We saw this as a performance required by academics. Essentially, however, we were asking could this be achieved in a different way? We took the time to reflect. We wanted to pause from the rhetoric of higher education to produce, produce, produce with whoever you can. We were wondering, what is possible?

Megan: Coming from a creative practice-based research background the notion of publishing journal articles and book chapters was not at the forefront of my scholarly practice. I needed to learn how to do this. I needed to learn how to write. So I read. I consumed academic writing books and 'how to do a Ph.D.' books. I needed to become as a friend said, 'a triple threat; she makes art, she writes, and she researches'. Still not sure of what and how to do this transformation, my supervisor showed me her publishing plan for her next years' publications. I realised it was just like how I planned my artwork practice, breaking it up into steps, series, pieces and times. Writing with others is a part of this plan. It is a way to put into practice the ideas I had been thinking about how to become an academic, an academic who collaborates, and an academic who publishes with others.

The written work could be made generative. It could be unmade; the produce, produce, produce could be remade into a response that both was satisfactory and satisfying. I could respond to other things like social media use of academics without detracting from my Ph.D. work or creative practice. In fact working with Narelle became a way to try out different theorists, seeing how their work could inform our discussions and unpacking ideas in analysis. In making writing generative, it has become a way of thinking through and with the problems of academia. The pressure to write, to publish, then transformed into becoming fun, social, and a dialogical shift in my relationship with the problem of writing. This relationship with writing changed to one of doing an unfixd formulation that we know how to do. There is always an abstract, and always a conclusion but it is neither where it begins or ends.

I realise now it is about becoming a transdisciplinary researcher. The skills are not just of writing, researching, analysing but of translating a becoming, translating patterns, actions, doings, and disciplines.

8.4 Setting

Academics who Tweet is not our primary research focus, we set loose annual goals of what we would like to do in the project and what outcomes we would like. Writing is planned by dialogue; we meet in various cafes around Melbourne and talk through what the plans are for writing and schedule. We write in Google Docs, each with our own colour text, so we can see how each other are progressing and how the ideas are developing. Each written outcome takes between two and three months with (loosely) fortnightly meetings. Each meeting we set a clear expectation of what is to be written for the next meeting so it can be discussed and progressed. Once the big ideas of the article are discussed, we get down to the planning and word allocations of each section, divide up the data, and who is doing what. Our challenge is how to make the analysis and discussion sections in the writing, coherent and collaborative. We do this by discussion in these meetings, asking questions, and offering other ways of considering about what we are thinking.

Relations in academia can be difficult to maintain, we have many competing things that we need to do. Building research relationships to enact research together and to write together is a building of trust. Seeing how people want to present themselves on Twitter gives an insight in how they operate, what their interests are, and what they value. It gives a facet, a partial view that can lead to interesting ways of working in academia that crosses boundaries of disciplines, time and spaces. In the *Academics who Tweet* project, we followed each other through Twitter and Instagram for about a year and a half before we met together. We had conversations on Twitter that progressed our thinking in our individual projects and saw how each one of us instigated individual articles, projects, artworks and activities. We also celebrated each other's successes and commiserated our failures. We knew a facet of each other before we started to collaborate.

Our setting is the higher education environment. Although we united at the same institution, we have since moved to other locations. We are, however, very aware of the need to publish, to build a research trajectory, and for the need to collaborate.

Through the growth of our collaboration, we have been able to mindfully observe how we wish to engage in the rhetoric of the measured university. To write in certain journals, to demonstrate engagement and impact and to build a trajectory that is revealed over time. We have also been conscious that this is difficult. We have both had numerous experiences of unproductive collaborations and times when our ability to write has been used against us, that is to do the work with little recognition and in environments that are highly competitive with colleagues displaying undesirable behaviours.

We were interested in how we could play in this environment as a whole. We as the actors in this performance have changed the scripts. We have edited the script, so to say, to be self-aware of each other's needs and to find ways to work that does allow us to engage in meaningful research and outputs but in a way that is supportive, comes from a space of compassion and kindness, and builds each other's skills (writ-

ing, research methodologies, practice-based research approaches and productivity strategies).

Alongside this has been the practice of making. Writing can be making, but for us as creative arts practitioners making is heavily embedded in the process of the creation of an arts product. Playing and exploring with textiles, tools and the physical act of making and remaking using our hands is important to us. Our connection to hand and mind has been imperative in this process.

8.5 Appearance

Narelle: We both come from an arts background, and there is a part of me that's curious about our discoveries into finding how we could write, individually and collectively. We are trained to honour the process as much as the product. In writing this is much of the same. However, with the pressures to write, and beginning from the doctoral experience, the love hate relationship seems so much more tension packed than with drawing, photographing or painting for example. We learn as we do in both creative endeavours, but for me I have had to be much more strategic in how I approach writing. I have had to learn tips and tricks along the way. Patterns of what makes a good abstract for example. It is how Pat Thomson (2012) has written about patterns in working with data, writing has different genres in academia and we need to learn about each of these genres and what is expected. Making through drawing and painting for example has this as well but for me it has much more of an organic approach.

Megan: Early on in my Ph.D. research, my supervisor reading my early draft literature review, asked me 'Have you been working to the studio while you've been writing this?' When I answered no I hadn't been for about 6 weeks, she immediately replied, 'You write better when you've been to the studio, I think it gives you time to think. Make some time for the studio each week even if only a couple of hours'. This leave to go to the studio began a pattern of writing and studio work and making which I have continued to today. Building patterns of working are an important part of building a thinking and writing practice.

Each of my thesis chapters has a crochet or knitted blanket made for a warm thesis. When I get stuck in the writing, I pick up the sticks or hook and do some work with my hands, to settle into the stuckness. It is a way for me to think about being with the stuckness and also how to counter the stuckness. Usually I work out my next step, my next move with a repetitive action: reading with and through the thread. Attending to the weaving and unravelling, and following, and unfollowing a thread.

Narelle: I've been to music school and art school. I've learnt a lot but essentially my flow just didn't come in these environments. Not like I know now with writing. Music school killed my love for playing. The strict routines and the pressure around this didn't align to my ideas of creativity. But I now engage in art making as a mindful practice, and I enjoy the chance to develop new skills and experiment across disciplines. My activities with knitting, crocheting, painting, photography, and drawing complement my writing. I use them as a way to refocus my thoughts, to stop thinking and be present, and to also process ideas. Mindful creativity through making has also aligned to writing through inquiry; it has been a significant mindful approach in how I write. It has also been Megan's practice of picking up the stick or hook that inspired me. She was instrumental in me reconnecting to making to help me think through the writing process. The feel of the wool, the action of focusing on a stitch, the growth of a project, and the mindful act of being in this space alone (not multitasking) has been a substantial mindful practice for me. My mindful blanket habit actually begun with Megan's

help. She took me shopping for wool and a pattern to extend my childhood skills. All to help me reconnect with the act of making to mindfully tune into quiet time to reflect.

Megan: In my work I think a lot about making. Making is not always just a straight forward progression with the material (Ingold, 2011) but also the unmaking and remaking as a going backwards, and sideways; a slipped stitch and then, a need to unravel, or to frog it as the knitters say. Knitters will sometimes go through a process of steaming the yarn to unkink it, others will start to reknit with the inherent kink adding to the material. The touch of the kink recalls and amplifies the pattern before becomes a part of the new pattern. I think writing is much like this. The patterns remain of past and the present to hold the future potential, sometimes with success and at other times not. But it still holds it close.

Clandinin and Connelly's metaphor of narrative inquiry (2000)—*inward* and *outward*, *backward* and *forward*—is a way of thinking through the dimensions of pattern making in research. It is 'to experience an experience—to do research into an experience—is to experience it simultaneously in these four ways and to ask questions pointing each way' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). In our questioning, these movements of our experiences of writing together, we move through the experience of becoming and being an academic in different ways. It is in recognising these differences that add to the complexity of our work and writing in ways that we had not predicted. Our experience become overlapping, and gives structure and strengths in ways we had not thought of.

8.6 Manner and Front

Mindfulness strategies enable us to be more resilient. Our formal and informal practices are individually experienced but collectively shared. In this way, our manner of approaching writing together also reveals out front, when it has not worked for us and how we have mindfully adjusted to acknowledge, accept and change our approach.

Narelle: I have participated in the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program created by Jon Kabat-Zinn (2003), as shared in Lemon (in this collection), as a part of my personal disruption to the stressors of higher education. It was through this that I was able to reconnect with my love for making, and to also form more formal mindfulness practices. I now meditate daily and attend Iyengar yoga on a weekly basis. I found bringing attention to the breath through meditation a way to quieten my mind and to notice what thoughts and feelings keep emerging. It also helps in how I have shifted off-loading all my stories and the anxieties to Megan when we caught up. For me the rhetoric of publish, publish and 'publish or perish' has been evident since I began my doctoral studies. And it has been a message I have repeatedly heard throughout my career as I have moved across institutions. It was my mindfulness coach that brought this to my attention. It was especially my being in a state of unrest and resentment about how much I had been publishing and maintaining this alongside all my other responsibilities that contributed to burnout. When I was sharing a story I had created about it not being acknowledged and that the goal posts kept changing that my mindfulness coach replied 'Ah, so you are allowing yourself to be milked like a cow'. Wow. This just landed me. As I observed this with curiosity. I began to consider how I could write but in different formats that meant I could connect with the creative aspect of writing but was not at the beckon call of higher education expectations. This is when blogging for me became a mindful practice to capture my thoughts and share with others. In sharing this

with Megan, she just smiled. A smile of, hello, yes. A knowing smile. My mindful learnings and personal reflection have allowed me to share with Megan and be able to bounce ideas and ways of being with her. In helping me, I also help her.

Megan: I think that the ways of working with and within the systems of academia Narelle has developed and maintained over the last four to five years as we have worked on the *Academics who Tweet* project really speak to her engagement of becoming an academic on her terms. It is a powerful and forceful stance to take. And I see that it is not easy. Working together however, the writing has become easier (yes, it's still hard) and an easier conversation as we have both learnt what is to work together, transforming ideas into unpredictable outcomes.

In learning how we work together, we figured and refigured out that we like to meet in cafes. And cafes that we know. We block out a few hours. We quickly talk about the pressing personal things first; the new pressure, the job search, and the research issue that cropped up. We want to talk to each other, first as friends and to be supportive. Then, we talk about the writing. To talk about what we have found a new book, a different way of looking at the data and what theory could fit with a pattern we have found in the interview data. We assign jobs and section word counts according to who is interested in doing what and more importantly what is going on in our worlds. We tried to Shut Up and Write (SUAW) at our cafe meetings but it did not really work for us. I like to talk and to unpack the problems at hand and then to write. From this process of talking, the structure of the article becomes more tangible. So, we devise a plan to be present with our writing but also present with ourselves and the energy we gain from each other when we mindfully listen, share and support one another.

Narelle: Megan observed how we had tendencies to chat for hours and then have only ten minutes to talk work before heading off to our next engagement. This noticing without judgement profoundly changed how we write together. Our manner and front changed in that we developed strategies to honour the face-to-face time for connecting about all things exciting in our lives and for decoding and reconstructing our experiences in higher education, sharing news on our latest making endeavours, and talking about our *Academics Who Tweet* work. We set deadlines together, accepting each other works to different schedules and external pressures. And we set up a system where we talk together, play together on ideas then write away from each other in a Google Doc. We colour code our writing and make comments along the side in the pop out boxes to acknowledge interesting thinking or ideas or to pose a question because we are experiencing writer's block. We promised each other that we will write the sections allocated by the next time we meet for a cup of tea in a cafe. We also stay connected through text messages and social media. We share our craft or making process as a way to celebrate our mindful time making but to also advocate this action to support writing and thinking.

Megan: Alongside our regular order of a green tea and extra hot water for Narelle and a soy caffe latte for me, laptops, colour pens, post-its, notebooks at the ready, we share the experience of academia. In making the experience of academia shared, we gain ways of being and becoming academic that enriches the ways we think about the research we do. We have both enjoyed when we can present our work together and share the travel experience of going to places which are different to our regular lives.

8.7 Front Stage, Back Stage and Off Stage

We keep moving forward and growing because we love what we do. We love working together. We thrive on our friendship and we are energised by each other. Over the years, we have begun to know each other so well that we can support one another to navigate the ‘publish or perish’ rhetoric but also everything else that comes with working in higher education. We know about each other’s triggers, idiosyncratic behaviours, passions, visions and styles of working. We relish in our passion project together. And we just have fun. We smile, laugh, cry, celebrate and problem solve together. We know that our *Academics who Tweet* project is the break between other projects and the stressors that can often be associated to other projects.

We write about academics using social media, but we also are active users as well. We use social media as a way to network, engage with ideas, seek emotional support, generate ideas, extend thinking, access information we cannot access in other situations, for peer-to-peer learning, to keep connected with each other and with friends and colleagues who are not physically located near us, and to hook up with other like-minded people. We also share our work together through blogging, Twitter and Instagram as a way to disseminate our publications but engage with others about the work itself and how other academics use this technology.

At the back of and off stage, we mindfully engage in practices that enable us to grow together as co-writers but also as individuals.

We are present—When we are chatting about our writing we honour this conversation. We know we need to talk about other topics and lived experiences but we always make time to connect to our work and the thinking that drives our writing and inquiry. We are present with each other. We have found that a cafe allows this to occur as we select a location that is away from any distractions that occur if we met on campus. We listen attentively without judgement and enjoy being in the moment of ideas and flow.

We are curious—We have a genuine curiosity to our research and the writing we are working on at the time. We are also curious about strategies we can engage with to support our writing.

We are compassionate and honest—We show compassion for each other and are honest with each other. If we have to negotiate timelines for example, we accept this and work towards finding solutions that work for the both of us.

We love what we do and we have fun—We may be focusing on work but it energises us. We cannot help but smile.

We talk—Communication has been key to our co-writing relationship and to the growth of our friendship. It is rare we are not sharing ideas, new theories or books, and of course new making projects.

We make—We thrive on the making through writing and through the acts of craft and printmaking. We know that this action helps us connect to our ideas and thinking.

We learn from each other—We are always learning from each other. This comes from a space of having developed respect and trust with each other.

We help each other in other areas—We are mindful that sometimes we need to talk through blockers or barriers to our work together and in navigating higher education. We mindfully make time for this when we meet and in how we engage with each other via other formats.

We know when to give each other space—we know each other so well that we know when to mindfully give one another space to process lived experiences. These are often not associated to our co-writing but do impact our ability to write.

We push one another—As we are working on other projects away from each other, we are open to learning new things and being pushed with our thinking. Working with theory and how we apply this labour to our research and writing has been a highlight of this mindful curiosity to the work we do.

We set realistic goals—This has been something we learnt very early on and we negotiate and find ways to support our co-writing.

We publish—But we do not put pressure on our self to publish or use the perish model—thats survival and not helpful. We are mindful of this as we plan, co-write, and research. We give the impression we produce—and we do, but on our agenda.

We share with others—We are aware that how we work is unique and through our presence on social media we have been observed by others so we write for blogs on our approach and openly share our strategies with others to support their approach to co-writing and collaborations.

8.8 Conclusion

Working together with the *Academics who Tweet* project has been pivotal for both of us in realising ways of being and becoming in academia. To think that we are in a state of becoming unfinished is to think with the possibility that the work we are doing is always a part of a process, and a part of a pattern of making. The patterns of how we write together change as we do more in our collaboration but what becomes visible to us is the trust we have in pushing and encouraging each other to go further. It is a way to work on our limits of knowledge, to create knowledge in different ways and to touch the material of our making and its inherent kinks and slips.

We see co-writing, making and our collaboration as a way of mindfully connecting. It comes from a space of playfulness and exploration (Gilbert, 2015), or fun as we call it! Our connection to the creative process is deeply invested in making as connecting (Gauntlett, 2011), as we

connect things together (materials, ideas or both) to make something new ... [we engage in] acts of creativity usually involv[ing], at some point, a social dimension and connect[ion] ... with other people ... and through making things and sharing them in the world, we increase our engagement and connection with our social and physical environments. (p. 2)

Creatively making in response to the pressure of ‘publish or perish’ in academia is also about making friendships that endure. Making friends with academic writing is a part of our response to the force of ‘publish or perish’ but it is also a response that

is generative. It is generative because it challenges us to be mindful in the ways we respond to the stuckness, to our collaborative attempts to create texts, or our approach to our friendship. We come to this from a stance of curiosity, and through formal and informal mindful practices. Becoming an academic we think can be ‘made’ fun by responding to the forces that call for answers in particular ways. This has worked for us, it may not work for others. We acknowledge we have certain privileges and affordances in the academy that others may not. But we have found that by making, playing with patterns, and creating ways of becoming that counters the force of ‘publish or perish’ in unexpected ways—and by having fun becomes a response worthwhile to us.

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Megan McPherson is a practicing artist, educational researcher and has taught and researched in the university art studio for over 20 years. Megan is a Ph.D. scholar in the Faculty of Education, Monash University where she is conducting a transdisciplinary research study of the role of the crit in studio pedagogies. She is interested in emerging research design and methodologies, feminist and queer critical theory and professional practice in the arts and education. Megan is currently working on a number of research projects that are investigating academic identities and practices through and with space, place, artefacts and texts.

Narelle Lemon (D.Ed, M.Ed, B.Mus, B.Teach, Dip.Man.) an Associate Professor in the Department of Education, Faculty of Health, Arts and Design. Narelle's overarching research area is focused on participation and engagement. She explores this through a variety of avenues including social media use for learning and professional development, creativity and arts education, and positive psychology specifically aimed at mindful practice and coping strategies. She engages with creative pedagogies, visual narrative and narrative inquiry to investigate lived experiences. Narelle has received over \$1.2 million worth of nationally competitive grants and awards. She has been successfully awarded research awards including: La Trobe University Mid-Career Researcher Excellence Award (2016); La Trobe University Early Career Researcher Excellence Award (2013); Early Career Supervisor with Most Publications Award within the School of Education, RMIT University (2012); and Early Career Researcher International Travel Award from RMIT Research and Innovation (2012). She is often invited as an expert speaker and commentator in the media and for online communities on research culture and education issues. Narelle blogs at *Chat with Rellypops*, Tweets as @rellypops and @mindfulacademic and curates an online project to promote stories of how creativity and mindfulness are applied to people's lives from various disciplines in the community on Instagram through @exploreandcreateco.