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**REDUCING THE DRAG:  
CREATING V FORMATIONS THROUGH SLOW  
SCHOLARSHIP AND STORY**

*Sense Publishers*

INTRODUCTION

Areas of inquiry: Reclaiming care in academe; slow scholarship;  
narrativising women's lives in academia

*Every seed destroys its container, or else there would be no fruition  
(Scott-Maxwell, 1979, p 65).*

We are three women working across two Australian universities. We know the deadening, withering nature and containment of the neoliberal university. Yet, we find ourselves inspired by the wisdom of slow scholarship and recognise that with our deliberate activity with each other we have been emulating something of the cooperative reciprocity inherent in the energy-boosting-V-formations adopted by groups of flying birds. Our chapter is a breaking free of managerial containment and a proclamation that 'not everything that counts can be counted' (Collini, 2012).

In this chapter we resist the insidious, diminishing drag of managerialism, comparison and metric-based audits of productivity and outputs—we have 'outgrown' these narrow containers. We recognise the joy and pleasure of responding to our longings to connect, to 'care for self and others', and to 'be' differently in academia. Our resistance and pleasure has been found in opportunities to listen and to converse in meaningful ways—ways that give time to reflection and relationship; ways that enable us to work cooperatively and speak our lives into the academy.

We use this chapter to invite the reader into our deliberate storying and re/de/storying of our lived experience and our practising a politics of care and collaboration. It feels pleasurable (and naughty and rebellious too) to be subverting what it means to be a productive, accountable and useful academic and to be offering alternatives that seed new, fruitful, meaningful and altruistic ways of working.

**It's a fine line between pleasure and pain**

***Pleasure***

*The ongoing conversations and thinking has been something that has sustained me through the last tough years of academia—times when my workload has been beyond me, and my sense of academic worth at rock bottom.*

*In this collaboration I have found that I have contributions to make, that research can be so much more than what the academy perpetuates.*

*Our group, our wonderfully nicknamed “Wise Women”... WOW! For the first time EVER in my academic life I have a group of women around me who are inclusive, who get me, who affirm me, who do the work, who are amazing, who are ethical, who value ongoing collaborations, who also operate from an ethic of caring.*

*Sharing the load has felt important too. And that load sharing looks different each time, but it never feels like “here I am again, doing it all on my own”.*

*We are prolific ‘responders’ and so I find our informal email conversations that ‘surround our research work’ as meaningful as our academic writing.*

*(Ali reflecting April 2016)*

***Remembering***

It is important to shed light on our academic experiences—to make public the stories of what it has felt like, and feels like, to be an academic—so that collective conversations about academic culture and the current social, political and intellectual life in the academy can take place. Often our personal stories are linked directly to political contexts and so sharing them is essential to developing new understandings about the workings of larger political discourses and structures (Berg & Seeber, 2016). Stefan Collini’s book, *What Are Universities For*, reminds us of the importance of making space for reflection about the complexity and uncertainty of academic work, particularly in these contemporary times where academics are feeling pressured to lead and live ‘affectively thin and relentlessly diagnostic lives’ due to the ‘steady poisoning and paralysing effects of managerialism’ (Collini, 2012, n.p.).

**It's a fine line between pleasure and pain**

***Pain***

*Tired and empty*

*Life-sapped, energy depleted*

All forms filled in, boxes checked, still room for improvement

*All hours in the day spent*

*Dragging feet, heart crying out, trying to listen, trying to add value, trying, trying, trying, dying*

*Where is the joy, the vision, the making of a difference?*

Compliance, accountability, do more, do more with less

*Pressure, guilt, drained from doing, yet not doing enough?*

*Not doing what matters... ..to me*

*Where is what matters?*

*The mattering of meaning, community, and relationships.*

Compliance checks, benchmarks, performance measures by COB

*Too many deadlines, too many deadlines, too many deadlines.*

*Dead inside. Draw the line.*

*I don't want to stand back and let education and systems and accountability delete the person, delete the joy and the creativity*

*I don't want the shallow to delete the deep*

*I don't want the far gaze to delete the looking closely*

*I want to understand your life and for you to understand mine*

(Snippets of longing, from a free form poem Ali penned way back in July 2010, Black, 2015)

Our current understandings have grown out of our experiences of universities as bureaucratic corporations—of feeling managed, compared, stressed, demoralised, distracted and fragmented by the constant and frantic pace, work overload and relentless demands for increased product and productivity in jobs with no boundaries (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Gill, 2010; O'Neill, 2014; Pereira, 2015).

We are not surprised to read that stress in academia exceeds that found in the general population (Catano, Francis, Haines, Kirpalani, Shannon, Stringer & Lozanski, 2010). The consequences of this academic climate can be devastating. There are human costs, as this blog on wider lessons shows: <https://musicfordeckchairs.wordpress.com/tag/professor-stefan-grimm/>.

We think soberly of the life and needless death of Stefan Grimm (1963 – 2014) a 51 year old professor, who had submitted the highest number of grant applications in his faculty, who had brought in \$265,000 in grant income, who had made fundamental contributions to the understanding of cell death in connection with the development of cancers and was researching an anti-cancer gene, who had published 50 journal articles and two books, and who took his own life after being told by his head of department:

*'you are struggling to fulfil the metrics of a Professorial Post... and must now start to give serious consideration as to whether you are performing at the expected level of a Professor...'*

In a final email, Stefan wrote:

*'What these guys don't know is that they destroy lives. Well, they certainly destroyed mine.'* (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2861588/Professor-dead-cash-row-Cancer-scientist-said-told-fellow-academics-chiefs-treated-like-s.html>)

We think deeply about the human consequences of narrow measures, constant threats, relentless pressure and instruments of comparison and shame. Like Maggie O'Neill (2014) we believe it is time to pause, reflect upon and resist the relentless performativity and measurement of academic life.

### **It's a fine line between pleasure and pain**

#### ***Pain***

*Hi Janice and Gail,*

*Just trying to follow up things that I transfer in my diary from one week to the next. GRANTS is a big one—driven by that awful institutional imperative. I have heard that without an external grant I won't get promoted back to Level C (the level I had before I came to this university, but which they refused to consider in HR appointment processes). So, I am looking for a grant space.*  
*X Ali*

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*Ali,*

*I am in the same boat—an external grant will be vital for me to move up to Associate Professor—but I'm not sure I care at the moment (although I change like a chameleon!)*

*☺ Janice*

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*Ali and Janice,*

*I am a yes—in fact I am a yes please.*

*I need a grant too. I need it so that I can at least be considered 'legitimate' in 'their' eyes and would use it to try to gain an ongoing appointment.*

*I get tired. No, I get weary. Weary is tired-er than tired isn't it? But I do have a large capacity for work. And I would work hard to make the grant successful.*

*And working with you gives me my 'hum'.*

*Xx Gail*

(Email exchanges between Ali, Janice and Gail, one Saturday in February 2016)

Sigh.

This is the type of culture in which we are situated, we three women academics/writers/artists. Our work as academics is defined by increasing demands for accountability and effectiveness (Stachowiak-Kudła and Kudła, 2015), outputs (Lee, 2007) and measurement (Burrows, 2012). We are situated in highly gendered workplaces (Husu, 2001). We are surrounded by high levels of academic dissatisfaction (Fredman and Doughney, 2011).

How can I *survive* in these cultures of measurement, audits, comparison, segregation and stratification?

No. No, my friend. This was the type of question we *used* to ask—individually, alone, and hopelessly. We had absorbed the corporatist rhetoric of individual responsibility for so long that we had begun to ask the wrong questions. We have stopped asking ourselves this question.

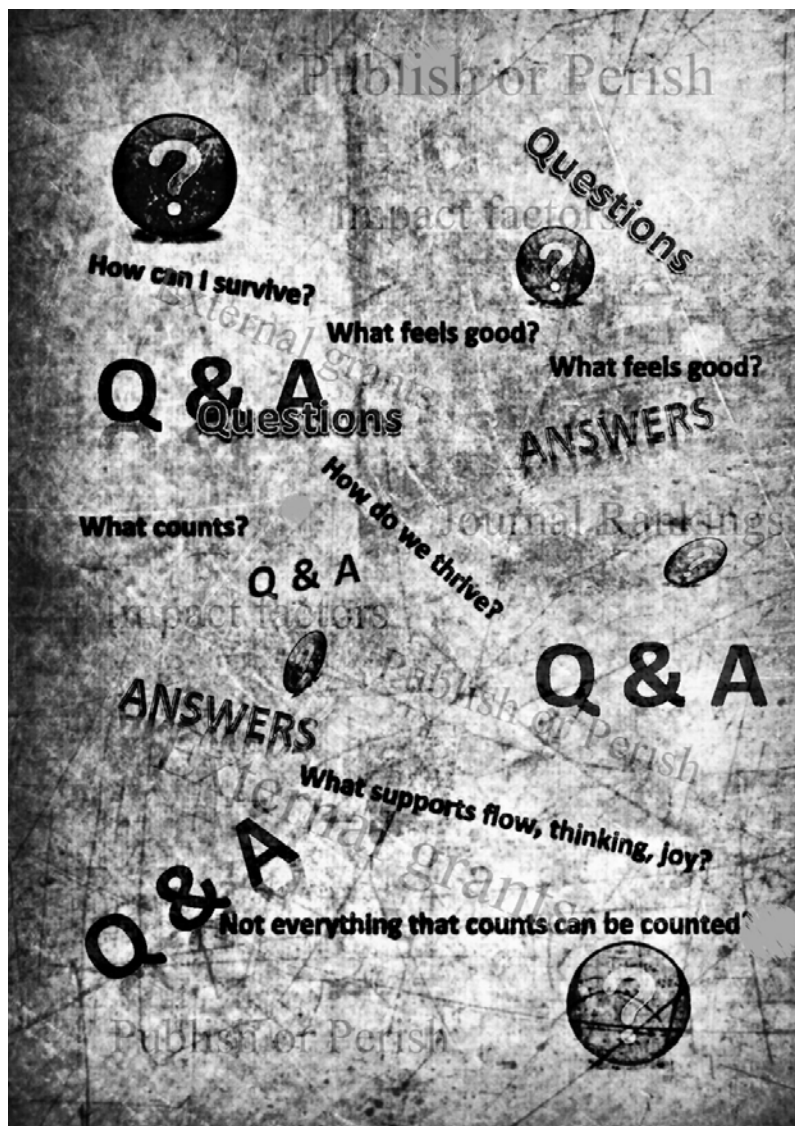


Figure 1. Asking questions.  
Digital artwork by Ali Black 2016

Questions are powerful tools. They elicit answers in their likeness. There is something life-giving about formulating and asking better questions (Tippett, 2016).

We have changed the questions we ask. Now, we ask: How do *we* best *thrive* in cultures of measurement, audits, comparison, segregation and stratification? We ask: What gives us meaning? And pleasure? Our work meaning? And pleasure? Our lives and relationships meaning? And pleasure?

And we listen with a different ear, not the ear of the academic assembly line, not the ear of impending doom and helplessness. We listen to our enduring questions of what it means to be human, to our questions of who we are to each other, and we listen with genuine care and presence. We listen to our shared longings to lead a good life, a connected life, a life of meaning and relationship. As we listen we are re/orienting ourselves to ‘ethical scholarship for the common good’ (Zuidervaart, 2011, n.p.)

We three women academics/writers/artists are beginning to show our resistance to the narrow academic containers of measurement, comparison, and productivity of the contemporary university. We are working *together*, a group of like-minded women, and together we are embracing the values of ‘slow’—the ‘slow movement’ (Parkins & Craig, 2006)—‘slow scholarship’ (Mountz, Bonds, Mansfield, Loyd, Hyndman, Walton-Roberts, Basu, Whitson, Hawkins, Hamilton & Cyrrand; O’Neill 2014)—and the focus of ‘the slow professor’ (Berg & Seeber, 2016).

Our group of like-minded women is growing... ..we are more than three... ..Julianne, Sarah, Linda... ..we are ten women academics... ..Lisa, Yvonne, Paula, Angie... ..and more seek to join with us... ..we are continually adding to our number and together we are pushing back against invisibility, shame and metrics to welcome conversation, collaboration, mentoring, and community building.

### **It’s a fine line between pleasure and pain**

#### ***Pleasure***

Gentle caring enfolded embodied

Life generating

Deliberate

Careful

Slow

I sit in the stillness of your writing  
Your writing—like a quiet companion who is just there  
holding my hand  
waiting patiently  
for my return.

(Poetic observation by Sarah, about Linda and Ali sharing writing as relationship)

We are no longer individualising our endeavours. Self-sufficient individualism, mastery and rationalism are old props which weaken community (Mijs, Bakhtiari et al. 2016). They are props we are happy to discard. We are letting these go and opening to otherness, deservingness, ethical engagement, mutual support and trust, conversation and collaboration, politics and pleasure. We are working as a collective. We are remembering what we love—flow, care, compassion, relationships, meaning, deep thinking, reflection, creative research and teaching.

In our everyday lives, complex and busy as they are, we are with deliberate care and attention giving priority to working in meaningful, sustainable, thoughtful and pleasurable ways. We are re/learning that giving time to self-care is not indulgent, that caring for another supports our own success, and that giving time to conversation, connectivity and collaboration in our local working environments has a ripple effect (Barsade, 2002).

### **It's a fine line between pleasure and pain**

#### ***Pleasure***

An opportunity to write, to tell, to share, to relive, to experience the whole of it by reliving parts of it. The journey starts always at that moment when everyone is content and involved in their own moments. I move and sit and look at the screen, the keyboard, pause for a moment and then it begins, it flows, sometimes caught like water in a dam, lapping, and then trickling through and then flowing freely, spilling over the top. Likeminded souls residing in the same eras, moved by the same social frames, coming together via awkward technologies, sharing their journeys, their lives, their most memorable, heart-wrenching, soul-giving seconds, hours, and days. In these sittings, someone else's story moves our being, confirms the challenges that must be faced by us as humans. This is life, our lives committed to words, images, metaphors, and emotions. Our emotions freely spill onto the page, and as we reflect and support one another and seek the deeper meanings, the resonance—and we find we are one, united. Together we soar high above the pages, the heartache, the challenges, the memories—we are brave in these moments when we share the what and the how and the why and the why not, and the so what, and the where to... We are women united by sorrow, loss, love and dreams. We are women who now dance bare in the twilight and breathe.

(Julianne reflecting January 2016)

We want more than survival. We want life affirming, joyous, meaningful, collaborative and celebratory work. We want work that supports balance and our own and others' wellbeing.

Asking the right questions has directed us toward agency, purpose, pleasure, fulfilment and self-care/caring relationships.

We know! Crazy huh?!

### *Fly like a bird! Invoking the V formation*

Many birds fly in a V. Yet they are not born with the skill of flying in a V, they learn the art of V-formation flying from *each other*. It could be they are watching the bird in front and responding accordingly; they might be using their wing feathers to sense the air flow around them; or they might be finding spots that feel good and be using this ‘feel good’ feedback to guide them—‘this feels good when I flap like this, and when I flap like this it is easier’ (Portugal et al, 2014). These are interesting observations that we too can employ: What is happening to the ‘bird’ in front of us? Is there good air flowing around me or do I need to do the *opposite* of what the bird in front is doing—so I don’t get caught in its downwash? What feels good for me, what makes my work feel easier, pleasurable, freeing?

We like the last question a lot. *What feels good for me?* Recognising the importance of affective functions and moods, Mihaly Csikszentmihaly asserts the more a person experiences ‘flow’—an optimal state of inner experience—the happier he or she will be (2008. p 6). We are now recognising, and looking for, those conditions that support our flow—our highly focused, present-moment, imaginative, joyful work.

By engaging in our writing and research as a collective we are tapping into pleasure, togetherness, connectedness, interest and joy. These positive emotions are undoing the damage of our highly managed work environments, and we are finding ourselves more resilient and creative, and our collective outputs intellectually expansive and prolific.

#### **It’s a fine line between pleasure and pain**

##### ***Pleasure***

Black, A., Crimmins, G., Jones, J.K. (accepted). Reducing the drag: Creating V formations through slow scholarship and story. In S. Riddle, M., Harmes, and P.A. Danaher (Eds) *Producing pleasure within the contemporary university*. Sense Publishing.

Loch, S., Black, A., Crimmins, G., Jones, J., Impiccini, J. (in press). Writing stories and lives: Documenting women connecting, communing and coming together. Book series Transformative Pedagogies in the Visual Domain, Common Ground Publishing. Eighth title *Embodied and walking pedagogies engaging the visual domain: Research co-creation and practice*. Kim Snepvangers and Sue Davis (Eds).

Loch, S., and Black, A (2016). We cannot do this work without being who we are: Researching and experiencing academic selves. In B. Harreveld, M. Danaher, B. Knight, C. Lawson and G. Busch (Eds). *Constructing Methodology for Qualitative Research: Researching Education and Social Practices*. Palgrave MacMillan: UK and US.

Crimmins, G., Jones, J., Loch, S., Black, A., Albion, L., Impiccini, J., Berryman, A. (written, looking for a home). Telling lives of women: (Re)presenting personal memoirs collectively.



Black, A., Impiccini, J., Crimmins, G., Jones, J. (2016). Finding connectedness, finding belonging, finding our voice: Contemplating creative and connected futures through storytelling and narrative. Paper presented at the *RUN Regional Futures Conference*, Rockhampton, 21 – 24 June, 2016.

Black, A., and Henderson, L. (2016). Stories of mourning: Reclaiming personal/professional identities through writing. Paper presented at the *Australian Women's and Gender Studies Biennial International Conference*, Brisbane, June 29- July 2, 2016.

Crimmins, G., Black, A., Jones, J., Loch, S., Albion, L., Impiccini, J., Berryman, A. (2016). Risky discourses: Promiscuously storying women's lives. Paper presented at the *Australian Women's and Gender Studies Biennial International Conference*, Brisbane, June 29- July 2, 2016.

Crimmins, G., Jones, J., Loch, S., Black, A., Albion, L., Impiccini, J., Berryman, A. (2016) Telling lives: Women, stories and healing. Paper presented at The inaugural Narrative, Health and Wellbeing Research Conference. *Enlightened: Narratives and Narrative Strategies to awaken applied and creative humanism*, 8 February, Noosa.

(Collective outputs from our group of 'Wise Women', with more in preparation)

By working together we have optimised our individual and collective experience; we have created a collective advantage.

Science shows there is actually no aerodynamic advantage to be had in leading a V formation—and so it would be reasonable to expect birds to want to minimise the amount of time they spend up front. What researchers have found is that birds are often working in pairs and matching the time they spend in each other's wake by taking frequent shifts in the lead position (Voelkha, Portugald, Unsölde, Usherwood, Wilson & Fritz, 2015). The birds are taking turns, sharing the load, and benefiting from this shared arrangement. By working together, a flock of birds is greater than the sum of its parts. By working together they create a collective advantage; by invoking the V formation they are optimising the collective experience.

### **It's a fine line between pleasure and pain**

#### ***Pleasure***

Ali had set up a space where *all* the women in the group, *all* of whom had stolen five minutes here and there from busy lives to write about their lives, were to share their work, and expose an inner layer of self. More so, Ali shared her 'chapter' and exposed her soft and tender underbelly. She trusted us. So through *a joint vulnerability* I ceased to be 'me' and we (the group, wise and warrior women) became 'we' and 'us'. We were all asked to share something of ourselves. We were all invited to read and see each other's lives with a shared sense of fragility and transparency. And so I shared, and the other wise warrior women shared their stories in a process that births a

sensitivity and trust for not only the work we produce but for the women we are.

And it was this process of *everyone* contributing, *everyone exposing* their writing and selves that allowed me to share my developing story.

And without there being a particular moment of transformation or one event which shredded my cocoon, somehow over time and conversation and sharing and laughing/crying at and with our stories/lives my 'I' disappeared. Even in the most personal of ventures of writing of and about oneself, the 'I's have gone. Now fearless and fortified by solidarity and vulnerable-strong women we are ready to share more publicly our work, just part of which happens to be written by me.

(Gail reflecting January 2016)

What can we learn from the V formation? For the academic, 'flying'/working together in this kind of formation allows room for togetherness, it allows room for others, and otherness. Flying in this kind of formation is an ethical choice. It isn't the common choice. If we take our metaphoric cue from birds, and their long-flight migratory hauls, we can see that collaboration, cooperation and relationship is enabling. We can see the value of working together, of joining knowledge—together we are stronger than we would be flying isolated and alone. Curiously, our 'publication outputs' demonstrate this truth. As a collective we have an 'enhanced spirit of enquiry, and more intelligence, deductive speed, and inventiveness than we possess as individuals' (Brennan, 2004, p 62). (Note, Teresa Brennan, at the time of editing her manuscript, which we are citing, left her house to complete an errand and was struck by a car and killed—a stark reminder that life is precious and short and that if we have to work it should be meaningful and hopeful, joyful and pleasurable.)

The V formation runs counter to the individualistic, competitive formation that current metrics and measures seem to/aim to generate. Adam Grant (2014, p 4) identifies that 'every time we interact with another person at work, we have a choice to make: Do we try to claim as much value as we can, or contribute value without worrying about what we receive in return?' Grant's (2014) research persuasively emphasises that success is increasingly dependent on how we interact with others, that 'givers' dominate the top of the success ladder, and that giving positions us for success—and creates more ripple effects to enhance the success of people around us.

### **It's a fine line between pleasure and pain**

#### ***Pleasure***

Being part of this group has been like the unfolding of a net. It started in a small way—and Ali your leadership and input has been essential to the life of what we do. Your energy has encouraged us to create a network—but let's ignore the implications of contemporary and neutral virtual links. This group is different in intensity and focus: it is not about sharing cute stories on Face Book, or commenting briefly on a political issue. Instead we wrestle with that light—those ideas, weaving them back and forth across

our virtual loom. Our Wise Women group has never met as a body yet we have created a rich and powerful process for writing. From sharing those tentative first steps in writing our lives, to the sharing of video conversations about those works—the giving of critical but wise feedback and encouragement has given life to trust and much shared humour and wisdom. Like light, ideas shoot along the networks—rapid fire emails, drafts of narratives wrestled over for hours, or flung out from an hour’s creative passion, photographs, words of support—come together to create a mesh of light as sharp as the nerves of a living being. That mesh is a weaving of light—the stories of women whose complex lives include academic and emotional labour, care for others, challenges to care for ourselves.

This is the first time I have felt that my unique voice is heard and valued. I have been able to offer wisdom and encouragement to women who like me are struggling to balance lives full of turmoil, joy and the routines of caring. This time has allowed me a space to understand and to begin to voice the enormity of grief at the loss of my life-partner. But—beyond the therapeutic value of the word, there is that steely focus: we are writers with purpose, and with a critical ear and eye. Our intellectual life flows along those neural pathways, and I am so glad of that richness.

(Janice reflecting January 2016)

Working in V formation, each member of the group remain close, receiving nourishment and rest, and help with supporting her own weight. Strength is gained and regained over time. Affiliation and belonging sustain and positive feelings expand to influence group dynamics, attitudes and emotions. This changes the emotional culture from one of suppression and dispiritedness to one of satisfaction, caring, motivation, joy and belonging (Barsade & O’Neill, 2016).

The members gain lift and energy, and are uplifted by the ‘good air’. Working in this way is subversive, efficient, supportive and altruistic.

We are joyfully experimenting with V formations and V signs. We are resisting the academy’s gaze and judgement and changing our way of doing things. We are boosting our efficiency, stamina and range. We are reducing ‘the drag’ and ‘sharing our flight fatigue’ and this is enhancing our energy, productivity and creativity. We are experiencing a collective wellbeing and vigour from working deliberately and thoughtfully in ways that feel gloriously rebellious and taboo. These are signs of contempt and defiance, these are gestures of victory and peace. These are working for us!



*Figure 2. Delighting in V formations*  
*Digital Artwork by Ali Black 2016*

*Every seed destroys its container, or else there would be no fruition*  
*(Scott-Maxwell, 1979, p 65).*

In the drying and dying of everything comes a new way, a new form. Over a year ago, seven women academics/writers/artists, of which we are three, started to share stories, memoirs, images and extended poems in order to express our lives, share our joys and challenges, and to connect with other women academics/writers/artists. Over this year, through initiating and sustaining conversations, we have formed a trusted group of colleagues and we are acquiring responsive, personal and aesthetic ways to address and reconcile our personal/professional lives. We are unearthing our individual and collective voice, and creating and expanding safe spaces for scholarly, professional and personal disclosure and meaning-making.

Through this time to write, and share, and become friends, we three + more academics/writers/artists are finding our courage to resist those cultures that diminish who we are as people, cultures that rarely recognise the fullness of our contribution, or the fullness of our lives including families and personal lives and raising children/caring for elderly parents. We resist conditions that build cultures of ‘care-less workers’ (Lynch, 2010), because we do care.

We do care—for ourselves, our students, our work, our families.

And as Pereira (2015) suggests, in order for us to enact our care it is absolutely crucial to resist this tendency of individualisation which pervades performativity in the academy.

When we enact our care, this care that values human nature and human expression, this care that values community and connectedness, others feel—and we feel—heard.

We have been heard.

**It's a fine line between pleasure and pain**

*Pleasure*

Heard.

Being wise woman  
I'm a beginning wise woman  
I'm no one special  
But I used the invitation to write the story that was  
stuck  
through all my other writing  
stuck  
in overcoming my situation  
stuck  
and in my falling-asleep, to stop berating, stop waiting, stop picturing  
what was sad, but just would not be

I used the writing to take some power  
to tell my story to women who really cared  
and even cried,  
who asked questions  
because they cried.  
Tears in their eyes.

and I stopped my waiting, living in the nether-land  
and told my story  
just as it came.  
There was no judgment  
There was no shame.  
Just my life  
at that time

but now, with the story slipped to one side,  
away from the front  
I have some space  
as the word that  
gorged on me  
is killed.

Dead.

Failure.

Failure? fail her...? for her?

.... I have by these women,

been heard.

(Sarah, offering her experience of our group of 'wise women' January 2016. Sarah's response epitomises our collective experience of feeling/being 'heard'.)

*Seeding new, fruitful, meaningful and altruistic ways of working*

We imagine, conceptualise, share and write collaboratively. Simple really. And without consciously or deliberately doing so we are reducing the drag that accompanies academic cultures, the drag of writing on our own, and the drag of feeling in competition with other academics. Such burdens only support the neo-liberalist system, they are weighty and we now realise, are unnecessary.

Our coming together in vulnerability and trust has supported our learning to write, to converse, to relate collaboratively in a V formation. Single file vying for the front position is exhausting. We don't do that. We take turns. In our V Formation one of us (often organically) provides the primary support for the flock, supporting the motion and lift and direction. And the others watch the motion, observing the unfolding, enjoying the opportunity to fly on the tips, imagine destinations and catch the updraft. Soon we are lifting together, producing together, supporting, motivating, and energising each other. By flying as a team in this formation, each of us feels the assistance of another as we fly. We rotate (also organically) and someone new moves to the front. Fatigue is avoided, strength and vigour is renewed. We learn and grow as a team, always observing, responding, and staying close. Caring. Keeping sight of each other

Instead of working to unsustainable directives and time-frames we give time to sharing, regularly sharing—and deeply listening to—stories of life, of worth, of resistance. We write creatively, without the pressure to add citation to each claim made, without the formalities of 'masculine' discourses based on myths of objective research, without the time pressure to meet 'by close of business' deadlines.

We are creating spaces for joy and daring and togetherness. We are listening with deep attentiveness to one another's stories. By doing so we are achieving something that none of us, or our broader group of female academics could have imagined.

We are creating worlds of delight, where uncomfortable, contradictory, in-between, challenging and boisterously disrespectful ideas are given new life and space. Our joy in listening, and of allowing and encouraging ourselves and each other to speak of and attend to aspects of our lives that we believed could not be told, is creating a rich space for thinking otherwise. Breathing life back into the crushed spirit of iconoclasm we are finding great contentment in attending to the slow rhythms, the balance and the flow of our lives as women who are academics. Yes, we still are wrestling with the challenges of caring for others and ourselves, of being heard in academia, and of negotiating our way beyond the boundaries, the habitus and the 'way things are done here' in the university. But with our storying, our friendship and bravery, we are questioning 'what counts' and rising above fear.

**It's a fine line between pleasure and pain**

*Pleasure*

Rising above fear

Ah, Relief immediately follows.

Our shoulders drop

Our guards drop

Our fear subsides

And we slowly take off our 'academic' attire, and share and listen to the women inside the women academics. And what amazing stories and voices we hear. We hear of the love and heartache of a woman grieving for her partner lost to alcoholism. We hear of the beauty in the chaos of living with a child with Downs Syndrome; of a women overcoming the hidden shame of ivf (intentionally lower case). We hear of the strength of a mother, supported by a father, who created equality of opportunity within a working class community in the 1960s and 70s. We hear of a journey through depression and are reminded of the gift of story and connection. We are energised by this 'good air' that surrounds us, our group of courageous, living, loving, and caring women. We listen and our bodies sing with relief, joy and acceptance of ourselves and each other.

(Gail reflecting May 2016)

We know, with great certainty that we are enough. Our work can make us feel that we do not 'measure up'. But we have been reminded we are more than our citation index, or student evaluation scores or grant income tally.

The sense of verification and acceptance in our group's sharing and caring experience is powerful. Through our sharing, listening and connecting with each other we are establishing value in each other and ourselves; we recognise a different value to the metrics and measures that are being held to us as carrots and sticks. And something fundamental is shifting. We are beginning to understand that the metrics and standards being imposed and reified are simply constructions, they are versions of someone's truth - not necessarily *the* truth or a truth we accept. So we reject those measures, and we establish for ourselves a new set of values, an alternative guide for our academic and non-academic practice. In doing so we interrupt and 'rupture the bounds of what is permissible and possible' in academia, in writing, and create for ourselves a manifesto of caring and care-full collaboration.



Figure 3. A manifesto for 'Reducing the drag'  
Digital image by Ali Black 2016

"Curiouser and curiouser!"

After working with each other, we now wonder if we have ever before been properly heard. Such is the careful listening. The thoughtful responding. The authentic caring. Of this group of women.

We have found sacred ground—a sense of place, identity, authenticity, belonging, safety, beauty.



We are relishing our forms of communication and connection—arts-based methods, poems, storying, and writing as research. And with these tools we are creating our own definitions of productivity.

It has been so curious to see that in our sharing of selves, our shedding of academic cloaks, our breaking away, we have become more focused, more productive, and more passionate. In academic terms, we three+ women academics/writers/artists are engaging collaboratively in developing conference presentations, academic journal articles, book chapters, grant applications, edited book collections, and so many pleasurable projects and processes.

It has been curious to find that with our escaping from the ‘pressure to publish’, to perform, to evidence our academic selves, we are creating spaces to share memory and meaning, to unveil the veiled women underneath our pain-(t)ed academic faces. Quite organically, these spaces are generating and opening new opportunities. We find ourselves wallowing in warm, comfortable and passionate spaces of collective scholarship. We are reconciling inner and academic lives. And this sweet resistance to managerialism feels incredibly pleasurable.

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with our practising slow scholarship and a politic of care and caring, subverting what it means to be productive and what it means to be an academic. It is not a subversion that requires anger or fight—well, maybe just a V sign or two!

Subverting pressure to pleasure naturally follows the rejection of the metrics and measures of the corporate, and the embracing of a slow and ethical scholarship for the common good.

We are engaging in a strategic and highly pleasurable V formation shaped REFUSAL of the quantifying stupefying delimiters of academic production. We are finding work lives that are reflective, rich, life-enhancing, deep, collective and invigorating. The drag of work can still mess with our flight, and we still experience days of discouragement, disillusionment, exhaustion and disappointment. But, the care of our group offers spaciousness, deservingness, appreciation, and acknowledgement. We are no longer alone in this experience. And knowing this togetherness is uplifting. And so we rest a while, enjoying the good air coming from in front of us; and we float in the certain knowledge that we are indeed enough.

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