

Writing the doctoral thesis differently

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Abstract

Writing a doctoral thesis is a testament to years of anxiety, excitement, confusion, terror and passion. A thesis is, however, much more than just an output of learning. It is a formative process through which a doctoral student learns what it means to be a researcher. The doctoral thesis as a form of academic writing has, however, received scant attention in organisational studies. My decision to write my thesis differently inspired me to think deeply about the conventions and procedures of doctoral writing. How is it that doctoral students write? What conventions govern them? And how could doctoral writing be done differently to expand the boundaries of thought in management? In this article, I give an autoethnographic account of how I wrote my thesis differently to provide the groundwork for doctoral students to reconsider the conventional approach to doctoral writing. Ultimately, I offer guidance and points of reflection for how doctoral students and their supervisors might break with writing conventions and contribute to their learning as emerging management researchers through writing the doctoral thesis differently.

Keywords

Doctoral students, doctoral thesis, identity, queer theory, writing

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The more I came to know my research participants the more some details of their stories would come back and replay in my memory – Evelyn's¹ mother shaking her and screaming at her when she was 7 years old, blaming her behaviour for the sickness in her family; Tia's mother being chased around a car with an axe being described by her as a childhood devoid of domestic violence; Kimberley feeling uneasy around locked doors because they bring back debilitating memories of rape; Ava's lonely childhood being told that she should be seen but not heard; Emily relapsing into substance abuse because of overwhelming feelings of being unworthy, which were compounded by an experience of sexual violence; Jen lying in hospital as a demonised teenage mother and not being able to hold her newborn for ten days. I sometimes see this when I look at these women; I see the hurt, the vulnerability, and the violence.

Sometimes I would look at them and see a diverse group of professional women bound together by a passionate anger against a system that condones violence against women. I would see Evelyn valuing all of her past life relationships, and seeing every man, woman, gang member, abuser, and victim she knew as worthy of support; Tia pushing for a practical approach to getting things done, stoically listening and caring about everyone as people; Kimberley using her keen sense of humour and absolute talent for her work to share it with others; Ava drawing on her need for connection to frame a collectivist approach to relationships in the office; Emily embracing her vulnerability to put herself forward and to take on board all the criticism she was given to improve the quality of her work; Jen mixing a tangible aura of no-nonsense strength, acute professional intelligence, and a deep-felt compassion to ceaselessly advocate the government for improved care for abused women. I see the potential they hold, individually and together, as an organisation for making the world a better place.

I am undone by those women.

¹ All names are pseudonyms

[Thesis extract written in April 2017]

Part I: Settings

The above is an extract from the opening of my doctoral thesis. Conducting the fieldwork for my doctoral thesis broke my heart. My study involved volunteering with a feminist domestic violence organisation in Aotearoa New Zealand. In my role as a 'voluntary ethnographer' (Garthwaite, 2016) I was committed, like my colleagues, to facing insidious violence against women on a daily basis. I am still sometimes lost for words when I sit to write about the sexual, physical, and emotional abuse my colleagues and our clients suffered. Initially, when I started to write my thesis, I struggled. How could I condense my research into a series of neatly defined chapters? I was attempting to follow the normative pattern of a conventional thesis; a scientific-like structure that moves from an 'introduction' to a 'literature review' to a 'methodology' to the 'findings' to the 'discussion' and summed up in a 'conclusions and contributions' (Piantanida and Garman, 2010). It seems ordered and elegant; a neatly bounded object that represents your competency. I knew I was a competent and clever doctoral student, but still my research did not look like that neat and tidy output. My research was messy; it was emotional; and it was not an easily divisible and logical process. So, I decided that I wanted the writing of my thesis to reflect what I felt was the nature of my research: messy, confrontational, emotional, and violent. I wanted to write my thesis differently.

Writing a doctoral thesis is a testament to years of anxiety, excitement, confusion, terror, and passion. Embarking on this (usually) final stage of any doctoral project is part of a massive commitment to learning, and communicating what is known to a select audience (Wegener et al., 2016). A thesis is, however, much more than an output of learning. It is a formative learning process through which a doctoral student learns what it means to be a researcher in their respective field (Kamler and Thomson, 2006). As doctoral students, we write our thesis for different reasons: to communicate what we have learnt; to let our examiners know we do know *something*; to please our supervisors; to fulfil the requirements of our scholarships; to get a job; to let the world know we

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loved something; to prove our friends, family, or enemies wrong. Whatever our reasons, we must write. My own decision to write my thesis differently inspired me to think deeply about the conventions and procedures of doctoral writing. How is it that we write? What conventions govern us? What procedures do we follow? What sort of management researchers are we producing through our writing? What does writing say about our work? And what does our writing hide?

Although there has been increasing attention to writing differently in organisation studies, the doctoral thesis as a specific form of academic writing has not been an explicit part of the conversation. The lack of attention to doctoral writing is particularly problematic as there is a fairly rigid, and almost formulaic, expectation of how a doctoral thesis ought to be written or expressed (Honan and Bright, 2016). Additionally, there are unique pressures surrounding doctoral writing such as the demands of writing an 'acceptable' thesis in order to pass and in order to lay the foundation for future careers. These formulaic expectations can constrain how doctoral students engage with their writing, their research, and how they understand what it means to be a management researcher. If these conventions are not reflexively considered or no alternatives are presented, discussed, and legitimated, this closes down rather than opens up the possibilities of learning and becoming a researcher through the doctoral process.

And there are, after all, many different ways to be a management researcher that reflect multiple axes of our identities and our intellectual and political commitments. How we write is just as important as what we write for becoming the type of management researcher we wish to be; whether that be a feminist, mainstream, queer, Marxist, traditional, critical, or postcolonial management researcher (Pullen, 2018; Grey and Sinclair, 2006). Doctoral writing is a privileged site of becoming a researcher and I argue that the processes around writing the thesis need substantially more attention. I do not make the claim that all doctoral theses are written in the same way. There are definitely many critical and reflexive doctoral theses (Wegener et al., 2016) that demonstrate different kinds of management researchers. But like with academic publishing and writing, writing

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differently is far from the norm and is seldom explicitly discussed (Parker, 2014). Most doctoral theses remain private or invisibilise, and the processes of doctoral writing are rarely discussed in organisational studies. With the little explicit attention to doctoral writing, doctoral students, such as myself, can find it difficult to navigate the conventions and consider how a doctoral thesis might be written differently.

In this article, I explore the conventions of doctoral writing through an autoethnographic account of how I wrote my doctoral thesis differently. I have suffused the structure and writing of this article with the same ideas about writing differently that I employed in my doctoral thesis. Namely, I oscillate between empirical and theoretical material throughout the article, drawing theory into immediate relief with lived experience. I also explicitly write in, rather than out, my passionate attachments to writing differently. I draw on autoethnographic methods to assist me in reflexively engaging with my doctoral experiences (Lake, 2015). Autoethnographic methods aim to foster reflection and learning, by critically examining our own experiences in order to theorize them (McDonald, 2013; Boylorn and Orbe, 2013) and autoethnographic material includes the subjective verbal and written experiences of the researcher such as diaries, letters, conversations, vignettes, poetry, or field notes (Denzin, 2014).

I reflect on my experiences during my time as a doctoral student and as an ethnographer drawing on personal material I collected throughout this period including poetry, vignettes, and letters that I wrote during my doctorate in order to make sense of my own experiences (Jones, 2008). In doing so, I offer a reflection on the doctoral thesis, the role of writing in the formation of researchers, and ultimately seek encourage other doctoral students (and those who support doctoral students) to reflect on their writing, processes, styles, and structures to ask: how can we write the doctoral thesis differently in a way that encourages expanding the boundaries of thought within management?

Part II: Conventions and constructions of doctoral writing

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Dear Ingrid,

For weeks I have been struggling with the writing of my final thesis. How can I condense this experience into linear chapters that go through my literature review, to my research methodology, to my analysis, to my conclusions as if this is the order in which all these things happen? I hated it. I didn't want to do it. But almost every thesis I have [seen] follows this process, even the ones that discuss 'radical' subjects. There seems to be little reflection on how we are structured by academic discourse that makes us conform to particular forms of communication... So, I've been working on restructuring my work. I have decided to include a section written in a typical 'PhD fashion'. This will be the 'setting' part. Eliminating this entirely would be to remove an identity that has been carefully cultivated through the process of induction into the academic community. It is also important to effectively communicate with a range of academics, as these conventions enable us to illustrate a particular form of 'mastery'.

But I can't do that for my whole thesis. It just doesn't work. It goes against so many things that I believe in. So, I've been working on developing a different structure. It removes 'chapters' and replaces them with 'parts' and will each include the integration of literature throughout, to try to illustrate that the analysis didn't crystallize ideas in a single way, and that these are all different ways of seeing. For me chapters imply succession whereas parts operate as different bits of a whole.

[...]

It's obviously a massive work in progress but I'm feeling much better about this. I need to do something different. I absolutely refuse to write in a typical scientific style. That goes against how I feel about myself as a person. It feels unreflexive, it feels untrue to the actual nature of research, it feels uncritical and conservative. I want to do something different. I want to express it in a new way.

[Letter written to a friend in November 2016]

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In reflecting on the letter, I see myself grappling with the conventions surrounding doctoral writing. The conventions of writing a thesis are exemplified in the plethora of books written to guide doctoral students through the doctoral process. In sections about writing the thesis, these books almost always encourage doctoral students to follow a rigid typology of structure and writing style that (these books assure us) will demonstrate the required 'mastery' to gain a PhD (e.g., Levin, 2011; Evans et al., 2014; Clark, 2007; Craswell, 2012; Oliver, 2008; James, 2014; Becker, 2007; O'Gorman and Macintosh, 2015). The structure these texts suggest follows a conventional, almost formulaic, style of 'introduction – literature review – methods – findings – discussion- conclusion' (Honan and Bright, 2016). As Evans et al. (2014) write, for example, "in essence, a thesis must first motivate the study, present background material and conduct a study. Results must be well argued and displayed, and the thesis has to end with a sound conclusion" (11). This rigid structure is evident in virtually every text about doctoral writing (Honan and Bright, 2016). From structure, to grammar, to tone, to content, the conceptualisation of *academic writing* for a doctoral thesis is extremely orthodox. These seemingly concrete boundaries – maintained like the 'necessary' chapters of a thesis - are framed as obligatory in order to demonstrate sufficient scholarly aptitude.

My letter expresses my growing discomfort with these conventions and the beginnings of my understanding of their limitations. Other higher education scholars have also expressed concern that the vast majority of texts about the doctorate espouse problematic conceptualisations of doctoral writing. Aitchison and Lee (2006) argue that "rarely is there an effective conceptual link between the current understandings of the centrality of the [doctoral] text to knowledge production and student learning" (265-266). Writing the doctoral thesis is, in other words, seldom reflexively considered. Although many guides on doctoral writing argue that writing is not 'just' the end of PhD but a vital and challenging aspect of doctoral work (e.g., James, 2014; Evans et al., 2014), they simultaneously conceptualise the thesis as only an output of learning. Some higher education scholars have challenged these dominant conceptualisations and argue that non-positivistic ways of doing research require a reconceptualization of the writing process (Piantanida and Garman, 2010;

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Aitchison and Lee, 2006; Honan and Bright, 2016). Following these arguments, I consider the process of writing the thesis *as* research, rather than just as the output of the process (Kamler and Thomson, 2006; Richardson and St. Pierre, 2017). Writing is constitutive; it forms a particular world view, produces a sense of self, and constructs our learning (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2017). Doctoral writing can be understood, therefore, as a formative learning process.

The writing of the thesis, like all academic writing, has material effects, and is a social practice as well as a set of skills (Kamler and Thomson, 2006; Lillis, 2001). When doctoral students are trying to find the 'right' words or the 'correct' structure, they are navigating the constraints of the discipline. Through their thesis a doctoral student must articulate a (legitimated) position within their field in order to successfully make the shift from doctoral student to a full member of the academic community (Aitchison and Lee, 2006; Richardson and St. Pierre, 2017). In my letter, I conceptualise this idea through the concept of 'mastery'. The thesis is much more than a product of the work; it is a process of (re)establishing the boundaries of knowledge in academia (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2017). Writing a doctoral thesis can be understood as a process of crafting a scholarly identity (McDonald, 2013; Hay and Samra-Fredericks, 2016) and is governed by the limitations and conventions of the discipline and the university.

For other forms of academic writing, however, the conversations about writing differently have gained considerable ground in management and organisation studies (Pullen and Rhodes, 2015; Parker, 2014; Grey and Sinclair, 2006). Arguments for writing differently in organisation studies stemmed from diverse bodies of work across the social sciences and humanities including the insights of postmodernism and poststructuralism (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2017; Westwood, 1999), literature and fiction (Czarniawska, 1999; De Cock and Land, 2006), feminist concern with 'masculine' writing (Pullen, 2006; Pullen and Rhodes, 2015), and the debates in other disciplines such as anthropology (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 2015; Clifford and Marcus, 2011; Behar and Gordon, 1995; Van Maanen, 1988). In contemporary academic writing practice, although conventional

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writing retains a strong foothold, there are also well-established spaces for, and practices of, writing differently in organisation studies.

Notably, such conversations about writing differently have often been framed as unbinding academics from the limitations of what we can do with our scholarship. The potential for writing differently in management has been highlighted as being useful for understanding methodological or theoretical commitments (Kara, 2013), processing emotions and vulnerability and incorporate them into the conceptual understanding of a project (Kara, 2013; Page, 2017), responding emotively to a social issue (Sayers and Jones, 2015), engendering transformation or activism (Vachhani, 2015; Harris, 2016), to actively disrupt management conventions and processes (Phillips et al., 2014; Grey and Sinclair, 2006), and to make academic writing more pleasurable to write and to read (Grey and Sinclair, 2006). In short: writing differently can open up the critical and creative potential of research to assist scholars in making a more interesting and creative contribution to the study of management; a key requirement of the doctoral thesis.

Another central interest of the writing differently literature in critical organisation studies is the relationship between academic writing and scholarly identity. Feminist scholars, in particular, have highlighted why we need to pay more attention to how we write. Writing in a conventional way can uphold the hegemonic masculine conventions of management which marginalise alternative ways of writing, researching, and being (Phillips et al., 2014; Pullen and Rhodes, 2015). Management writing often operates through masculinised forms of communication which involve writing in an emotionless, rationalistic, and masterful fashion (Grey and Sinclair, 2006; Pullen and Rhodes, 2015; Rhodes, 2015). Writing in a masculine way excludes, among other things, emotions, fluidity, violence, and messiness. Through the exclusion of feminine writing certain identities – such as women – become marginalised or erased in academia (Pullen, 2018). Writing differently, therefore, can open up new possibilities of identity and embodiment.

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Considering the insights of the writing differently literature, it is surprising that there has been so little consideration within management on the writing of doctoral students and the constraints and limitations that govern what sort of thesis is produced. As I was beginning to see in my letter, I deeply felt two implications of the conventional thesis structure: conventional writing was limiting the possibilities of thinking differently about theory; and masculine styles of writing were marginalising other ways of being a management researcher. I came to feel strongly that writing the thesis, learning through writing, and solidifying (or strangling) an academic identity through the writing process needs consideration. I needed to find ways to become the type of management researcher I wanted to be and to find creative ways of unbinding myself from convention.

Part III: Navigating the web of interpersonal influences

Excited about the prospect of writing my thesis, and confident that the writing differently literature offered substantive grounding to pursue this idea, I proceeded to share my thoughts about writing my doctoral thesis with those around me. As with the pressure to write in a particular style in order to be published (Özkazanç-Pan, 2012; Parker, 2014) there are numerous institutional pressures on doctoral students to produce a particular kind of thesis in order to pass their examination. Writing is not conducted in some state of romantic individualism, in which a doctoral thesis appears after locking oneself in an office, alone, for several months. On the contrary, the thesis and the simultaneous learning around researcher identity, is conducted in a web of interpersonal relationships that shape our understanding of what 'quality' and 'acceptable' doctoral writing looks like:

I've already developed a plan for writing my thesis and have two different folders on my desktop. One is titled 'traditional thesis' and the other 'experimental thesis'. I'm considering deleting the entire folder titled 'traditional thesis'. But I'm nervous. I want to talk through my writing plans with my supervisors but I'm worried that they will say that my ideas are better saved for after the thesis,

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or think that what I'm planning isn't a good idea. So, I decide to go halfway and propose my idea to my fellow PhD students at our next get together.

There are about 5 or 6 of us gathered together enthusiastically sharing our concerns about writing (Wegener et al., 2016). After discussing for a little while, I jump in when there is a brief silence. I turn to the room ask everyone how they are planning on writing and structuring their thesis. No one responds. Actually, they all look slightly confused.

After a pause, Michael looks at me a bit strangely and says: "Well, I write 200 words a day?"

My heart sinks a little, but I press on: "No, I mean, what is your structure going to look like? What writing strategies are you going to use?"

There still isn't a response so I grab the whiteboard pen and go up to the board. I draw my structure, explaining how I want to remove the literature review and methodology sections and integrate them throughout, ultimately only having three central sections each of which are written in a different style (Steyaert, 2015). This will be my structure, I explain. I repeat my initial question.

"Oh, I've never thought about it," Michael responds, "but shouldn't we just do it the normal way?"

I'm starting to feel a bit anxious – maybe I should just write my thesis traditionally? But James, fortunately, is intrigued. He asks me a few questions about how I came to my decision, and then sits back with a quiet 'huh', nodding his head. Later he tells me that he found what I said interesting and is going to rethink his structure. I'm so relieved that someone understood. Maybe writing my thesis differently is more important than I realised.

[Vignette written after doctoral group meeting in January 2017]

There is an emphasis that doctoral writing ought to be conducted within a social context in order for doctoral students to learn about peer review in academia (Adamek, 2015). Peer writing with fellow doctoral students is frequently depicted as a positive method for developing a researcher identity as doctoral students are able to share their concerns and develop their writing within a like-minded

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group (Wegener et al., 2016; Adamek, 2015). As demonstrated in my vignette, however, my desire to write differently received mixed responses from my peers. In the moment I describe above, I initially felt a gulf between my understanding and my peers' understanding of what a PhD is and what it should involve. In that moment I questioned whether or not I should be writing differently at all. When James showed interest, I felt relief wash over me and felt that perhaps, after all, this was a good idea to pursue. The doctoral process can be one of immense uncertainty in which doctoral students struggle to craft a secure scholarly identity (Hay and Samra-Fredericks, 2016; Kamler and Thomson, 2006) and students often rely on their peers to provide guidance (Wegener et al., 2016; Adamek, 2015). In my case, my interaction with my peers was mixed. Without circulating ideas of how we might write a doctoral thesis otherwise, it can be difficult for doctoral students to transcend the normative expectations of their peers and their discipline.

Thankfully, when I finally gathered the courage to put my ideas forward to my supervisors, they were accepting and enthusiastic. The supervision relationship is widely acknowledged to have extensive impact on the experience and learning of doctoral students (Peelo, 2010). Supervisors are tasked with guiding the doctoral student to producing 'scholarly' work; including the writing of the thesis (Kamler and Thomson, 2006). In this sense supervisors act in a similar way to the peer review process; acting as gatekeepers to what can be said and how it is said in academic writing (Alvesson and Gabriel, 2013; Parker, 2014). Unlike the blind peer review process, however, supervisors share a direct and personal relationship with the doctoral student. Supervision relationships are often permeated by feelings of inequality; students are often positioned as 'learning' from supervisory 'experts' (Bartlett and Mercer, 2000). Attempts to write differently can be therefore constrained by supervisors (Kara, 2013), particularly as supervisors are likewise constrained by pressures to ensure their doctoral candidates complete their studies (Adkins, 2009), which is of growing concern in a neoliberal context (Brabazon, 2017). In my case, my supervisors acted as enablers and actively encouraged my attempts to write my thesis differently. Their support helped me to mitigate my

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uncertainty and opened up the possibilities for me feel legitimate in pursuing my interests and rethinking the conventions of doctoral writing.

My participants were the most significant influence for my decision to write differently. I was once asked how my thesis would look if I wrote it for some of my participants. I laughed, because one of my participants – Tia - would find my academic writing style ridiculous, and on reading my thesis say something along the lines of: “what the fuck are you talking about bae?” while giving me an incredulous look. As a result of this interaction I thought more carefully about who I was writing my thesis for. Am I writing it for my supervisors? My examiners? My peers? My participants? An unknown mix of these people? As part of my process of writing in the early stages, I wrote stories pretending that I was one of my participants (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2017) and wrote stories and poetry about my own experiences. I also frequently shared my writing with my participants and talked about how and why I’d written in that way. And so, my writing started to take shape; situated among many different voices.

Our interpersonal interactions shape how we write. These people could be made to be explicitly present or absent in our writing, but our social contexts always shape what writing is understood to be acceptable for a doctoral thesis. In order to navigate the web of interpersonal relationships, doctoral students require the opportunity to reflexively consider who has shaped their writing and how these relationships have opened up or constrained the possibilities of writing differently. By opening up the discussion about the process of writing a thesis and circulating how a thesis can be written differently, doctoral students have more opportunities to reconsider their own writing. For doctoral students, feeling legitimate in their pursuit of writing is particularly important given their sense of insecurity across the process and given the frequently unequal power difference between doctoral students and their supervisors.

Part IV: Integrating disruption into doctoral writing

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I went home and sobbed today

Over what, respectively, seemed small and almost inconsequential.

Jen told me how, when asked to do a mathematics test for a new job,

She sat in her office and cried.

This brave, warrior of a woman

Sat in her office and cried because she couldn't do maths.

So now here I am. Sitting on my living room floor

Crying. Because I can't do anything about it.

[Poem written after interview in April 2017]

It was the experience of heart-break that pushed me to reconsider how I was writing my thesis. Heart-break is an emotion rarely considered in management, but when engaged with reflexively can help us to analytically and emotionally connect with our work (Whiteman, 2010). My poem describes what seems like a minor incident during my fieldwork, particularly given that my participants told me stories of their experiences of domestic violence, sexual abuse as children, rape, and isolation on an almost daily basis. But what this incident showed me was how utterly invested I was in my work and in the lives of my participants. Pulling myself out of my data after moments like these was not just difficult emotionally, but also impacted my writing. I felt like I was pulling two deeply knitted aspects of my self apart. My experience was similar to what Piantanida and Garman (2010) describe: "by the privileging of scientific research [in doctoral writing] with its emphasis on quantification... students often found themselves cut off from their deepest proclivities for shaping questions to study, modes of enquiry, and forms of expression and representation" (246). I felt completely cut off from the emotional turbulence of my field work and the messy experience which

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often characterises ethnographic research (Coffey, 1999; Mazzetti, 2016). I sought new theoretical ground that would give me a new framework to guide my writing and structure of my thesis.

My rethinking of the style and structure of my doctoral thesis was inspired by queer theory. Queer theory and theorists share a commitment to destabilising concepts and dismantling binaries and categories that seem natural (McDonald, 2017; Kelemen and Rumens, 2008). The aim is to open up the possibilities of agency and difference, by drawing attention to the normalizing processes which govern legitimated ways of being and acting (McDonald, 2017). Although there are a growing number of studies that use queer theory, most are restricted to using queer concepts to explore sexuality or gender in organisations (Kelemen and Rumens, 2008). There is, nonetheless, huge potential for queer theory to disrupt the commonly taken for granted assumptions and practices of management research (de Souza et al., 2016; Parker, 2002). Writing is one such practice. Queering management writing can be understood to: “unfold a style of assembling, of connecting quotes and texts that might disturb the usual expectations around logics of argumentation and linearity, and which might arouse another intensity of thinking” (Steyaert, 2015: 167). Queering writing is about challenging and disrupting hegemonic styles of structures of writing to unsettle the reader and writer into thinking differently (Adams and Jones, 2011).

In applying a queer perspective to doctoral writing I felt strongly that the common ‘writing out’ of the researcher from the doctoral thesis leaves us with an image of an objective, white, male, straight researcher (Pullen et al., 2016) whose gaze is directed toward the ‘logical’ phenomena in a situation, rather than the queer or the irrational (McDonald, 2013; McDonald, 2016). A formal, objective, and masterful tone erases or marginalises the messiness, emotional turbulence, and uncertainty involved in doctoral research (Wegener et al., 2016). Approaching doctoral writing in this way reproduces a conventional, masculinist mode of writing, limiting the potential learning about the place of the feminine and the subjective in research (Pullen and Rhodes, 2015; Phillips et al., 2014; Pullen, 2006). Consequently, most doctoral writing continues to emulate a homogenised doctoral

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student who is white (like me), who is masculine (unlike me), who is straight (unlike me), and who conducts research in a positivist way (unlike me). Following a queer critique, however, emphasises that instead of fixing our doctoral writing as hierarchical, linear, and rooted, we can think of our writing as a multiplicity and along multiple overlapping and divergent axes (Steyaert, 2015).

Unsettled by my heartbreak, I came to feel that queer writing could help to amalgamate the ways that I was emotional, irrational, unsettled, angry, and heartbroken into my thesis. In order to queer my thesis, I adopted a rhizomatic thesis structure; drawing inspiration from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and from examples of queer writing (Steyaert, 2015). Simply put, my thesis structure was non-linear. My thesis consisted of five parts and each part acted as a semi-independent node of thought which flourished in different intellectual territory. The structure emphasised the mess and uncertainty of doctoral work and the ways in which theories and methods get dropped out, left behind, and picked up in 'irrational' and non-linear ways. The structure also emphasised the shift in my writing before, during, and after my fieldwork; starting out by talking about my fixed ideas about being a management researcher and then disrupting and dismantling these in later sections of my thesis. I opted to write in, rather than out, the emotional dimensions of my ethnographic experience and maintained an explicitly personal tone throughout my thesis. In this way I disturbed conventional ideas of which aspects of the research experience are relevant to a doctorate. Finally, I oscillated between theory and empirical material throughout the thesis, refusing the impulse to reorder my thesis and to put the most salient theoretical material up-front. Through my oscillation and my explicitly emotional tone I sought to unsettle the reader and "arouse another intensity of thinking" (Steyaert, 2015: 167).

Part V: writing the doctoral thesis differently

Kimberley and I were chatting together one lunch time, sitting on opposite sides of the lunch table.

She was buoyantly explicating her views on the relationships between gender identity and violence,

and I was listening intently, intrigued to hear her latest opinions on the subject. I had the opportunity to work closely with Kim during my time volunteering – assisting her in her work and talking with her regularly in our breaks. She’s a young, educated, self-proclaimed “urban Māori²” who loves debating with her colleagues – myself included – about gender identity, violence, race, and politics. Our lunchtime conversation today has been about whether or not it is actually possible to end gendered violence. Kim argues that it isn’t possible, not with contemporary gender identity dualisms. She tells me that until we can imagine a third possible gender, consistently and coherently, there is always going to be a violent fight for the masculine to be dominant over the feminine. She laughs and summarises: “basically, every time I think about gender equality, I just think it’s never going to happen”.

Kim then asks me what I’ve been working on recently. I explain that I’ve been doing some reading about violence, thinking about the necessities of violence for forming identities (Bergin and Westwood, 2003) and I’ve been particularly interested in the idea that becoming something involves violently foreclosing the possibilities of other ways of being. Kim is very enthusiastic about the idea, linking it to her interests in how making some aspects of violence visible – “hypering” she calls it – invisibilises other kinds of violence. Hypering the idea that it is possible to end gendered violence invisibilises the ways that gender inequality perpetuates, she argues. Kim has been interested in the notion of the ‘undertow’ of gendered violence; all the complex and subtle ways that people unconsciously revert back to harmful gendered norms.

My lunchtime conversation with Kim left me, as it usually did, unsettled in my ideas about the relationships between gender and violence, and the relationships between gender identity and the possibilities of achieving social change for victims of gendered violence. I didn’t agree with Kim that it was impossible to end gendered violence, but my conversations with her were helping me to expand

² Māori are the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand.

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and challenge my own thoughts on the relationships between gender identity and domestic violence work.

[extract from thesis written April 2018]

My conversation with Kim is an extract from a middle part of my thesis. I've included the extract here as a final example, as it embodies some of the key elements of doctoral writing that I've drawn attention to in this article. In particular, the extract draws attention to my central writing strategies of oscillating back and forth between theoretical and empirical material; the explicit writing-in of the researcher; the web of interpersonal relationships that shape writing; and the queering of the conventions of doctoral writing. After having oscillated back and forth between the different pieces of writing in the article, it is worth examining how they interact and how I drew them together in my thesis.

As a researcher I am distinctively present in my writing. I note not only my physical presence in the setting, but also thoroughly detail my vacillating thought process as I learn from my fieldwork.

Rather than presenting my research as an elegant whole that started with theories and applied these to a context, I emphasise the complexity and messiness of ethnographic research and how research shifts and changes over time. In this extract I also underscore how my participants shaped the way I thought and wrote about my theoretical material. As I had earlier thought about how my participants would respond to reading about themselves in my thesis, I thought here about how Kim would react reading these passages. Kim's personality, which was at once cynical, animated, and clever, informed how I framed our conversation and the theoretical material. By suffusing my writing with my authorial presence, I queered the expectations of 'mastery' and demonstrated how my identity as a researcher developed through my engagement with others.

My thesis consistently oscillates between 'data' and 'theory'; challenging assumptions about the privileged place of academic literature and the researcher within research (Rhodes and Carlsen, 2018), as I demonstrate in this extract. I write with a particular emphasis on how my participants

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embody, disrupt, and queer the theories when they come to grips with them in practice (Butler, 2004). In the example, Kim takes the theories I've been thinking about and brings them into contact with her own work and ideas. In turn these unsettled my own ideas. The oscillation between 'data' and 'theory' aims to transcend the often arbitrary divisions between theory and practice. Most importantly, doing so assisted me in developing my theoretical contribution; thereby opening up the potential of my doctoral writing to contribute to my learning (Kamler and Thomson, 2006).

Furthermore, in this extract, as in all others, I explicitly comment on the emotional impact that my research had on me, as well as my understanding of the theoretical material (Whiteman, 2010). I write-in how I was unsettled and confused; dismantling the myth of the objective and illusive researcher (Kondo, 1990). Ultimately, I write-in my emotional turbulence to explore how 'mastery' of theoretical and methodological content was not achieved in my case through objective and thorough application; but through an emotional and embodied experience. By engaging multiple aspects of my research experience, such as the emotional impacts of researching violence, I stimulated my learning, and crafted a management researcher identity that embraced and embodied critical feminist scholarship.

Final remarks

The fundamental impetus of this paper was to open up the conversation about doctoral writing; to expand knowledge about writing differently in organisational studies by exploring some of the conventions of doctoral writing and offering an autoethnographic account of my own experience; and ultimately to provide points of reflection and guidance for other doctoral students and their supervisors to encourage more developing scholars to write their thesis differently. My account can provide the groundwork for doctoral students and their supervisors to reconsider the conventional approach and contribute to the learning of new management researchers. As an important site for the construction of researcher identities, we need to reflexively consider the conventions of doctoral

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writing and how these can be disrupted, played with, maintained, or challenged. For the final words of this article, I want to focus on providing guidance and points of reflection for doctoral students and those who support them.

In our thesis, our voice is one among many voices. Doctoral writing is produced in a social context often characterised by uncertainty and uneven power relationships. Accordingly, we must understand how our writing is shaped by our interactions with others. These relationships can be freeing or constraining for writing differently. For me, I was particularly influenced by my peers, my supervisors, and my participants. In navigating the relationships with my peers, I found that circulating ideas about writing the doctoral thesis differently helped to build a community of emerging scholars who wanted to work together to reconsider our writing conventions. Having the support of peers can help doctoral students to mitigate uncertainty and feel legitimate in their pursuits. Supervisory relationships can act as gatekeepers to writing differently. I would encourage those who support doctoral students to reflexively consider how promoting conventional writing might constrain the possibilities of making an original contribution to organisational studies. If we want doctoral work to creatively and critically examine management knowledge, questioning writing conventions is a necessary aspect of this process. Learning from my relationships with my participants helped me to question these conventions and I used this to guide how I wrote in my thesis. There are others who might provide inspiration for writing differently: activists, historical figures, or family and friends. We must ask who shapes our writing, how they are shaping it, and how these relationships might promote writing differently.

The growing literature about writing differently in organisation studies (and more broadly in the social sciences) provides a rich basis from which to imagine how the doctoral thesis might be rethought as a particular form of academic writing within unique constraints. I found queer theory uniquely suited to this task. Other doctoral students might find writing through storytelling approaches (Kara, 2013), fictocriticism (Rhodes, 2015), or as fiction (Rhodes, 1997; Watson, 2000) to

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echo their theoretical or methodological commitments and useful in finding creative ways to demonstrate 'mastery'. Feminist scholars could draw on feminine writing (Pullen, 2006; Phillips et al., 2014; Pullen and Rhodes, 2015). Doctoral students interested in maintaining the 'mess' of their research might draw on the insights of 'dirty writing' (Pullen and Rhodes, 2008). Bringing these ideas about writing journal articles differently into contact with doctoral writing can also expand and challenge scholars understanding of what 'writing differently' means to different parts of the academic community. Writing differently for doctoral students can invoke fears that the thesis will not pass, or that it will negatively impact future careers. Writing differently for doctoral students can also mean that a creative and critical contribution can be made, and that new ways of being a management researcher can be circulated. My experience here offers an example of what writing differently can mean for doctoral students.

We must also ask: what sort of researcher do we want to become? Our considerations for writing differently can come from our political and intellectual commitments. Part of my inspiration for writing differently came from my political commitments to ending gendered violence and from my commitments as a feminist researcher to honouring the multiplicity and complexity of women's lives. Other doctoral students might ask different questions. Postcolonial researchers might consider how their writing can operate as an act of decolonisation. Doctoral students wishing to provide answers for an organisation might consider how their writing might be both academic and accessible for practitioners. We might also consider our intellectual commitments to certain paradigms. My writing drew inspiration from my interest in poststructuralism and asked questions about the binary between 'theoretical' and 'empirical' material by finding ways to amalgamate these more intimately. If we reconsider how we approach writing the thesis – as I have advocated for in this article - we could reconsider how doctoral students connect with theoretical material and the complexities of researcher experience. Maybe we could also develop new and creative ways of engaging with doctoral work. This could involve, for example, a more practitioner-oriented thesis. Maybe

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something that won't gather dust in a library but that is accessible for managers while being critical and rigorous. Alternatively, an approach could be developed in which writing a thesis could be (heaven forbid) funny or entertaining. In order to write differently, we must understand the doctoral thesis as privileged site for learning to be a management researcher. And this, through our writing, could be many things.

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