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**Academic writing as love**

**Carol Marie Kiriakos & Janne Tienari**

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**Abstract**

Writing is presented in hegemonic academic discourse as a rational and predictable activity that targets publications in the right journals. Nevertheless, many academics struggle with writing. In this paper, we draw attention to how writing is experienced as an embodied, sensuous, emotional, social, and identity-related activity. Specifically, we aim to advance this comprehensive understanding of academic writing with the concept of love. By understanding love as action rather than feeling (hooks, 2000), we can foster our love for writing both as practice and in practice. We can learn to deal with the struggle by writing every day and approaching writing with dedication. By advocating the perspective of love, we seek to encourage discussion on academic writing so that it reflects the multi-faceted experiences of writers, and wish to unleash its potential in confusing and disrupting the masculine order in academia. Love offers a language to talk about vulnerability and courage, and viewing writing in the light of love helps us to learn more about ourselves and our activities as writers of management.

*Key words: academic writing, love, practice, learning, gender, autoethnography.*

**Introduction**

We, the two authors of this paper, love writing. Both work in a business school, but differ in our academic past, current positions, and experiences related to writing. The first author is a social psychologist and the second a management scholar. The first author coaches academic writers and the second is a professor who supervises thesis work. The first author is a woman and the second a man. We have collaborated in writing-related activities for many years, and together we have learned to look upon writing as love. This love is both mundane and radical. Following bell hooks (2000), we understand love as what we do to nurture our own spiritual growth and that of others.

However, in hegemonic academic discourse writing is depicted as an uncomplicated intellectual and instrumental activity. Many aspects of academic writing, such as its embodied and emotionally complex nature, remain taboos in academic work (Antoniou and Moriarty, 2008; Bell and Sinclair, 2014; Essen and Winterstorm Värlander, 2012; Phillips, Pullen and Rhodes, 2014; Pullen and Rhodes, 2015; Vachhani, 2015). This is evident in theoretical discussions on writing – and in how academics are evaluated and rewarded in practice. Drawing on hooks (2000) and Bell and Sinclair (2014), we suggest that the concept of love captures something essential to the experience of writing. Love helps make sense of the physical, sensuous, emotional, social, and identity-related challenges that tend to pass unnoticed when writing is discussed in organization and management studies. Our love of writing is expressed by approaching it with dedication and practicing it daily.

This paper is about academic writing, not publishing. Hegemonic academic discourse often treats them as synonyms. Like so many others, we find overemphasis on publications deeply problematic (see e.g. Billig, 2013; Grey, 2010; Grey and Sinclair, 2006; Macdonald and Kam, 2007, 2011; Parker, 2014; Willmott, 2011). Writing is much more than publishing; it is a way of communicating and a tool for thinking and doing research (Cloutier, 2016; Richardson, 2000). We wish to deepen our understanding of the comprehensive and social nature of academic writing by approaching its challenges and opportunities with the concept of love. The assumption that love is something “soft,” irrelevant or inappropriate for academia is questioned (Bell and Sinclair, 2014; Phillips et al, 2014; Vachhani, 2015). We argue instead that love is needed in and for academic writing. It exposes our vulnerability as writers and gives us courage to embrace writing wholeheartedly (hooks, 2000). We can learn to love writing and to write with love.

This paper is structured as follows. Next, the context for academic writing today is outlined. We then offer an overview of how writers and writing are discussed, and elucidate how we generated auto-ethnographic materials on writing and share our “love story.” Finally, we discuss the concept of love in theorizing about academic writing and consider its implications for learning.

**Academic writing in context**

The context for academic writing is changing. The collegial and self-governing practices of academia are shifting to decision-making models where authority is centralized in the hands of managers and administrators (Slaughter and Leslie, 2001). The external accountability of academic work is exercised through sophisticated measures, metrics, and control systems (Marginson, 2008) that change the ethos of what it means to be an academic (Kallio, Kallio, Tienari and Hyvönen, 2016). While academia has always had its restraints and pressures – and nostalgia is in any case a dubious endeavor (Parker and Jary, 1995; Ylijoki, 2005) – recent changes, and the managerialist discourse that sustains them, have led to considerable insecurity among academics (see e.g. Clarke, Knights and Jarvis, 2012; Knights and Clarke, 2014; Ylijoki and Ursin, 2013).

All this impacts writing as an inherent part of academic work (Parker, 2014). The competitive system puts pressure on academics to produce more publications at a faster pace and this leads to haste (Billig, 2013). At the same time, managers and administrators assume that writing is a predictable, intellectual, and rational activity aimed at reporting research findings in the right format (Antoniou and Moriarty, 2008). Many of those who wish to make a career in academia are under pressure to write articles as platforms for citation rather than as carefully crafted texts to be read and enjoyed (Macdonald and Kam, 2007). Publications in the right places lead to citations and to more publications that help accrue the social capital to do even more of the same (Van den Brink and Benschop, 2012). Academics are persuaded to write formulaic texts laced with jargon that is accessible only to select others (Czarniawska, 2008; Grey and Sinclair, 2006). In living up to demands for excellence (Butler and Spoelstra, 2014), they dress up banalities as profundities and then boast about it (Billig, 2013; Lund, 2015). It is difficult to “dare to be different” (Cunliffe and Bell, 2016: 113) as “today’s review practices are harsher and more forbidding than those in the past” (Gabriel, 2010: 763). Variety is flattened out and “critique will only be accepted if it conforms to that of which it is critical” (Grey, 2010: 687). All this serves to homogenize academic writing (Willmott, 2011) so that it risks losing its social relevance (Özbilgin, 2009).

How, then, does this relate to the *practice of writing*? While changes in academic work in the neoliberal university are actively debated from a critical perspective, less attention is paid to writing as a scholarly activity. Grey and Sinclair (2006), who offer a treatise on “writing differently,” focus on texts rather than the act of writing. Homogenization and lack of social relevance, too, tend to be discussed in terms of publications (Willmott, 2011; Özbilgin, 2009) rather than the practice of academic writing. To complement the critical discussion, we turn to research that acknowledges the holistic nature of writing.

**Writers and the writing process**

The cognitive psychologist Ronald T. Kellogg (1994: vii) writes the following: “the act of writing exemplifies to me the very essence of what it means to be human.” Nevertheless, many writers struggle with it (Boice and Jones, 1984). Studies are dedicated to understanding writing as a cognitive and behavioral process (Kellogg, 1994), with a focus on self-regulation (Santangelo et al., 2016; Zimmerman and Kitsantas, 2007), motivation (Hidi and Boscolo, 2007; Nelson, 2007), beliefs and conceptions about writing and oneself as a writer (Lavelle and Zuercher 2001; Lonka et al. 2014) as well as approaches that the writer can use to generate text (Lavelle and Zuercher, 2001). Boice (1990) defines strategies that help academic writers become more productive and less blocked. Strategies such as freewriting and using small blocks of time regularly are grounded in an understanding of writing as a comprehensive activity that includes cognitive *and* affective or emotional elements.

The concept of self-efficacy helps explain how confidence and belief in one’s capabilities influence the experience of writing. Referring to the work of the psychologist Albert Bandura and others, Bruning and Kauffmann (2016) pinpoint sources of writing self-efficacy. These include the importance of role models, encouragement from others, and recognition of the need for identifying one’s physiological and emotional states and their impact on writing. In turn, Nelson (2007: 17) notes in a discussion on writing motivation that its key components are related to moving: about “being moved to write and trying to move others.” On the basis of her analysis of what well-known organization and management studies scholars say they do when they write, Cloutier (2016) describes academic writing as a multifaceted experience: “‘writing’ (as a general practice) emerge[s] at the intersection of writing, in its physical sense, and other related, but essentially *nonwriting* activities, such as talking, reading, drawing, and thinking” (p. 71; italics in original). Cloutier (2016) maintains that writing is intricately intertwined with other practices (and rituals) of academic work and that it is profoundly social.

Why, then, is academic writing so often viewed as an isolated activity? And why is it still based on maintaining distance between writer and reader? Townley (1994: 25) problematizes the knowledge thus created, because it leaves no traces of its origins or of its journey: “the purpose, the reasons, the anger, the context, the location of the academic historically and contextually is removed [from the text] by academic convention.” Essen and Winterstorm Värlander (2012), too, recognize academic writing as a holistic experience characterized by embodied, emotional, and social dimensions. They identify physical aspects relevant to academic writing: the body (of the writer) and its sensations, the physical arrangement of the text, as well as the physical environment where writing takes place.

Alternative forms of writing – even if published in ‘scholarly’ journals – that speak to the reader and engage with their experience are envisioned by many academic writers. These include understanding writing as sounds and tunes (Dane, 2011), as dialogue (Helin, 2017), and as something that resonates (Meier and Wegener, 2017). Helin (2017) looks at writing as part of a shared research process that is emergent and unfinished and, above all, relational. Writing is viewed as part of a conversation and it is thus about offering the “tentative” to others. Meier and Wegener (2017: 193), in turn, explore ways “to facilitate an emotional, bodily, or in other ways sensory connection between the text and the reader.” They offer the notion of resonance to make sense of these connections: “When academic writing resonates, it has affective potential to move us” (p. 195).

The feminist critique of dominant masculine forms and styles of writing helps to address what is typically left unsaid when research is written and writing is talked about. In crafting texts for publication, academic writers learn to assume the normalcy of masculine notions of rigor, hardness, and penetrating conclusiveness (Phillips et al, 2014: 316) and adhere to a “logic of trajectory, strategy and purpose” (Höpfl, 2011: 32). The feminist critique renders such gendered writing open for discussion, although it may run the risk of essentializing masculinity (and femininity) as something monolithic. It turns our attention to understandings of writing that enable a multitude of affectual voices and texts; it defies rational categorization and creates a space where different forms of expression are explored and appreciated (Pullen and Rhodes, 2015). Women’s or feminine writing (Höpfl, 2000; Pullen, 2006) and “bisexual” writing (Phillips et al, 2014) are envisioned where masculine mastery is rendered unstable and where “embodied writing practices, feminine styles, playful genres and subversive practices sing and dance on the page” (Pullen and Rhodes, 2015: 89).

For the purposes of embodying writing and to pave the way for viewing academic writing in the light of love (Bell and Sinclair, 2014; hooks, 2000), we put ourselves at stake. We reflect on our personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings about writing and writers, while acknowledging the risk of embarrassment, of not being understood, of being dismissed or ridiculed, of being considered self-indulgent, or of being rejected.

**Writing on writing, with love**

The most revolutionary thing one can do is always to proclaim loudly what is happening.

*Rosa Luxembourg*

Our principal method for generating materials on writing is autoethnography. Although considered problematic by some, in line with Doloriert and Sambrook (2012) we acknowledge its value and believe that autoethnography helps to capture crucial aspects of academic life in stories that would otherwise remain hidden (Ellis, 2004). We do this because we find that it would be unethical for us to explore writing without involving ourselves. To paraphrase the Marxist theorist and revolutionary socialist Rosa Luxembourg, we need to proclaim – if not always loudly – what is happening to us and to those around us who we care about. Autoethnography is well suited for this purpose; it is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience (Ellis, 2004). It aims to produce meaningful, accessible, and evocative research that is grounded in personal experience and that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the influence of the researcher (Ellis and Bochner, 2000).

We, the two authors of this paper, experience writing differently. The first author finds it hard to be productive as an academic writer, while the second author has a steady writing routine. The first author has difficulties in allowing herself to focus on academic writing and write from the heart – but when she does, she trusts that her writing matters. The second author has doubts about the meaningfulness and significance of his texts. The first author has extensive hands-on experience in coaching academic and other writers, while the second author has supervised numerous academic theses and published widely himself. Our collaborative relationship thus resembles that of Antoniou and Moriarty (2008), the former being a creative writing coach and the latter an academic. As a woman and a man, however, we may embody writing differently (Phillips et al, 2014; Vachhani, 2015). As a writing coach and a professor, we are also situated differently in the academic matrix of power. In our early discussions we discovered that beyond our differences we share a profound interest in the *activity* of writing. We learned to respect our different approaches. For several years we talked about writing without trying our hand at writing together. However, our shared concern for how we and others struggle with academic writing and publishing led us to envision this paper. Writing the paper took some three years; we experienced delays due to our other obligations, and the first author gave birth to her second child and the second author changed jobs. However, we were not in a hurry. This was to be a joint writing initiative that we wanted to cherish.

For the purposes of generating writing on writing, we practiced collaborative autoethnography (see e.g. Geist-Martin et al, 2010; Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez, 2012). This resembles Meier and Wegener’s (2017) exercise of writing personal letters to each other with the purpose of articulating what resonates with them in texts that they read. However, collaborative autoethnography includes joint reflection and critique of personal stories and also revisiting them through a given conceptual lens (Geist-Martin et al, 2010). In keeping with this method of inquiry, we first crafted short texts separately, with rounds of reflective discussions between episodes of individual writing. We focused on the topic of academic writing and of ourselves (and others) as writers. As we had decided to craft a journal article manuscript together, these texts were already written for this purpose. Examples of our personal texts include:

*“Writing is what I have always dreamed of doing, but sometimes I believe that I do not deserve it; writing is a luxury. Many of those whom I coach seem to believe that it is not acceptable (concrete, respectable enough) in the eyes of others. What may look like laziness on the surface, however, is actually about being hard on oneself; the real issue is the difficulty of allowing oneself the pleasure of writing. It’s a form of guilt, I suppose.”* (First author)

*“I write these words in an airplane full of kids. The hustle and bustle is somehow relaxing. I am surrounded by cacophony, but I find that I can concentrate with this wall of background noise. My eyes wonder from the text on the screen to the people around me, then to the distance, and back to the text. My eyes get tired if they remain fixed for too long and then I find it impossible to write. Writing is visual.”* (Second author)

Our personal texts described the comprehensive nature of writing as embodied, sensuous, emotional, social, and identity-related activity, and reflected on the locations where it takes (or fails to take) place. How to make space for writing became a recurring theme in the texts.

*“In my writing coaching, I want to offer a space where there is room for everything: for all kinds of emotions, situations, issues, and discussions. I think the radicalism in this comes from the fact that it appears so banal and harmless. Whereas academic publication sounds masculine, achievement-oriented, powerful, status-evoking, and competitive, writing has a feminine, less important, weaker tone to it. It is thus radical to open the door for the affective and the banal in academic writing. It is radical to treat it as something holistic and comprehensive.”* (First author)

*“I believe in rhythm. It helps me to build the courage I need for producing text. I have discovered that I can write best in the mornings, and writing most mornings has become part of the rhythm of my life. When I manage to write, I feel alive. When I don’t, I get anxious. I have learned that sooner or later the words start flowing again. I’ll go to the gym or get some fresh air. Maybe a nice walk. Tomorrow is another day. But not Mondays. I can’t write on Mondays.*☺*”* (Second author)

Our texts reflected on care and commitment in writing. We pondered how caring about writing makes us vulnerable and how the way to overcome this is in the mundane; in taking distance to writing *and* finding the courage to come back to write.

*“For some reason, writing makes me nervous now. Sometimes, when something is going well, I get nervous. I get scared. The risk of losing momentum arises. The fear of losing what is good right now. So, I do what I often do: I set the timer at 10 minutes and start writing. I write freely for 10 minutes, keep the words coming, without worrying or thinking too much.”* (First author)

*“I’m excited about every text I write, for a fleeting moment at least, until the next one comes along. But the sense of no-one paying attention, meaninglessness, creeps in. Another text written, filed, and forgotten. Writing can become a form of self-deception. But I still want to write more. I’m obsessed with writing. And I enjoy writing these words. I think we’re onto something meaningful here.”* (Second author)

*“This academic shit is doing my head in. My body refuses to do this. It refuses to produce words. I want to lie down. I want to eat. I want to eat junk food and feel sick. My fingers refuse to touch the keyboard. There are no words in my head. I need to lie down. Or maybe move around. I need to do something with my body. Anything but sit here.”* (First author)

We reflected on how the anxiety we experience is related to the conventions of academic writing and how we can help each other to write. We also wrote about how it feels when we manage to write, when words just flow and we experience great joy in and through our writing.

*“I can’t keep my hands off this text. I’m supposed to be working on a paper that my colleague and I are revising for a journal. Instead, I’m writing about writing. I tell myself that I’m just taking time out from the revision. But it got so boring it disgusts me. So I keep making excuses. Tomorrow tomorrow. I’ll get back to the revision tomorrow.”* (Second author)

*“I have written for three hours today. I love days like this. My body feels tired, but in a good way. Now I just need to get some fresh air. The muscles in my neck are a bit tense, but my heart feels light. I want to stretch my body and be kind to it, do a light yoga exercise. I am so grateful. I feel privileged to be able to do this. I’m so in love with writing!”* (First author)

In the second phase of our collaborative autoethnography, we engaged in dialogue about our texts and discussed how to “theorize” them. Reading Emma Bell and Amanda Sinclair’s (2014) article on reclaiming eroticism in academia, we realized that our shared aim to treat academic writing comprehensively and to make it better could be understood in terms of love. Until then we had not been confident or bold enough to use the L-word in the context of academic work. Bell and Sinclair (2014) showed us that love can be used to rekindle all those embodied, emotional, sensuous, social, and identity-related aspects of academic writing. It also reminded us about a book called *All about love* by the feminist theorist, activist, and writer bell hooks (2000), which we had both read some time ago. We re-read and organized our texts with the help of hooks’ (2000) ideas about love as doing[[1]](#endnote-1). This became the conceptual lens as we moved from our personal texts to our joint story.

Following M. Scott Peck, the writer of self-help books, bell hooks emphasizes love as action rather than an instinct or feeling. Love includes willingness, choice, and intention – like Martin Luther King Jr., who famously said that he had “decided to love.” hooks (2000) suggests that we choose to love as we choose to act in ways that nurture our own and others’ spiritual growth. Love does not include hurt or abuse; if these are present, it is not love. Still, we are all vulnerable. Love helps us to accept our vulnerability, to be brave and to uphold a willingness to stand up for ourselves and for those we care about. Love engenders hope; our “suffering” can become a “place of peace and possibility” (hooks, 2000: 80). We need others for that. Self-acceptance is the foundation of love, but it is always practiced within the “context of community” (p. 76) and it thrives only if we are able to “surrender our attachment to power” (p. 221). The practice of love, then, is revolutionary; it embodies a struggle for justice and freedom.

hooks speaks from a particular situated position. As an African-American working class woman who discovered feminism in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement in the USA, hooks places class and race prominently on the feminist agenda. Against this backdrop, her ideas on love are all the more radical. While hooks is clear that love can be practiced in many different ways, in applying her perspective on love as white middle-class academics who write on writing we cannot do full justice to its original ethos as practice of freedom. We build on hooks’ (2000) ideas on love as “a combination of care, commitment, trust, knowledge, responsibility, and respect” (pp. 7-8) and reflect on what these could mean in academic writing today. We embrace her plea for an *ethic of love* in a quest for social justice (see Vachhani, 2015) and in turning away from preoccupation with domination in academic work. However, we do so only in part, as we do not directly confront inequalities based on race and class in this paper.

For some, there may be an apparent paradox in using the concept of love for analytical purposes. This is so only if we understand love as something essentially evasive. Understanding love in terms of doing makes it more concrete. In light of Clarke et al’s (2012) distinction between romantic, pragmatic, and unconditional love in academic work, hooks’ (2000) understanding of love is ‘unconditional’ in the sense that it is predicated on the communal and seeks no direct benefit for self. Nevertheless, in keeping with hooks, we work on a comprehensive notion that includes self-love. As such, we offer our collaborative autoethnography *both* as acts of writing with love *and* as reflections of writing as love. The quality of our work can be judged by evaluating our credibility as writers (Could we have had the experiences described?) and assessing whether or not this paper achieves verisimilitude (Are the experiences and ideas described possible and believable? Does love work as a lens for understanding academic writing?). As a reader you will determine whether our story of writing as love speaks to you (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Ellis, 2004; Sparkes, 2002).

**Love story**

We are convinced that love for the pleasure of pursuing intellectual challenges together with others has everything to do with academic writing. Without love, writing could not be what it is at its best: expression, communication, community, and advancement of ideas that may impact our own lives and those of others. Academic writing is not (only) about putting ideas on paper and getting them published. Material circumstances matter for writing and so do the physical body and its state. Writing is embodied and sensuous. Writers move ideas around as pieces of text, and *feel* them. We cut and paste, we try out different things on paper, we scribble and erase, we revise our writing before we arrive at a structure and form that seems to work. We utter ideas aloud for ourselves and *hear* them. We sample how they *taste* in our mouth before we write them down. We *look* at our ideas on paper or the screen.

But writing is more than that. It is an inherent part of who we are. For us, writing is something that forms our identities, not only as scholars, but as human beings. We love writing because it does something to us, whether it is expressing ourselves; anticipating the opportunity to write or cursing our inability to do so; supporting others in their writing; communicating, and collaborating with others in and through writing; or just casually talking about writing as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Writing makes us happy, sad, joyful, angry, brave, and fearful. It embodies us and it offers a journey into ourselves and to our relations with others. Writing helps us come to terms with who we are – and to question ourselves. Yet, the two of us do not embody writing in the same way. The first author talks about writing as if it were a child, precious and fragile, to be nurtured and protected. During the writing process she got pregnant, and finishing this paper became a race against time. Eight months pregnant she had to finally admit that writing became a burden. The second author, in contrast, talks about writing as a trusted friend who is there when needed, whether it is for finding the rhythm, sharing the fun, or helping to overcome difficulties in life. He finds great pleasure in sharing words.

We share the conviction that to flourish, love needs nurturing. It needs to be cared for. Time must be set aside for love, and space must be created for it so that it can find a place to grow. The first author has developed a routine of writing by hand every day. She endured the pain that it inflicted on her wrist at first. It no longer hurts, and she is convinced that writing by hand activates parts of her brain that tapping on the keyboard does not. The writing can be about anything, but she makes sure she finds the time to fill at least three blank pages a day. The second author, in contrast, likes to get up early and walk to his office in the deserted business school at 7 am, brew a pot of coffee, and start tapping loudly on the keyboard. His morning writing session is not only a routine; it has become a ritual of solitude and reflection, but it also yields something to show his co-authors.

But love is hard to practice in academic writing. We are supposed to individualize and compartmentalize it; we are advised to keep love separate from our intellectual “real” work that is doing research and getting it published. Academic writers are constantly reminded that it is not acceptable to approach writing wholeheartedly, and commit to it too much. Even if we allow ourselves to feel love for writing and to write with love, the challenges do not end there. Whenever we do something with love, doubt and fear kick in; there is so much to lose. Do we have something to say? If we write sincerely, critical feedback from anonymous reviewers hurts. It feels like a slap in the face. The idea of someone somewhere glancing at your work and deeming it worthless is scary. But waiting for the slap is worse than getting it. Fear is worse than the pain.

Clearly, it is writing in the academic context that makes us anxious. Academic writing par excellence – writing for publication in the right places and in the right format – is at the heart of this uneasiness. The two of us share the threat to our love, although we approach it from different bodies and positions. The first author is a relative novice and outsider. The second author has learned the ropes, but still feels clueless at times. This is despite the fact that writing for ‘top’ journals is intensely technical. It is relatively uncomplicated to master – the right kind of text, that is. A particular epistemology is forced on writers (take out the emotion and focus on the intellectual!) and a particular form and style is to be followed (stop reflecting and get rigorous!). It is assumed that theoretical knowledge requires this formula in order to be legitimate and convincing. So, you deliver what is expected.

Or you don’t. Perhaps it is the sheer technicality of supposedly successful academic writing that is the problem. Hegemonic discourse, which celebrates the right publications in the right places forces our love into a straitjacket. It dictates what is worth loving. It not only forces us to come up with particular kinds of texts, but insists that we do it fast. Again and again. If we write otherwise, hegemonic discourse exposes our inadequacy. If we write in an unconventional way and about questions that provoke unease or are considered awkward, the system chews us up and spits us out. And if we don’t submit at all, well, we don’t really exist.

We trusted each other enough to take our time writing this paper. We met numerous times over a cup of coffee where we both scribbled notes that were later used as raw material for our joint text. We took turns in crafting the text. We wrote separately, in private. We took long walks together and discussed ideas that one of us later turned into written words. We rarely sat side by side staring at the computer, but sometimes this, too, was necessary for sustaining momentum in our writing process. When the momentum was lost and when it was difficult for one or both of us to come up with words, we encouraged each other to come back and write. And we read. We shared with each other texts that moved us. We talked about our different readings and how they helped us to look at writing (and love) in multiple ways. Together we developed our understanding of how others before us had written about writing.

Writing this paper took a long time, but we were eventually ready to show it to others. We had a colleague who is a respected friend read the paper, and we took the critical remarks offered by this person on board. Our colleague liked the idea of viewing writing as love, but argued that our text *“needed fleshing out.”* We had not managed to convey the embodiment from the act of writing to our written text. After all the time and effort, love still seemed to be missing from what we had put on paper. Paradoxically, we had left out our original, personal and *“fleshy”* pieces of text in favor of more abstract and theoretical reflections. Reworking the paper once more delayed us by another three months. The first author eventually had to give up. Her pregnant belly was so big that she could no longer use a laptop, and back aches prevented her from sitting or standing. She gave birth, and the second author found himself to be responsible for finalizing the text alone. With a heavy heart, he cut out words to meet the limit set by the journal. After some months, we received feedback from reviewers and the editor. It was wonderfully generous and encouraging. We were so excited that we wanted to revise the paper right away. The first author came with her newborn baby to the business school to discuss how we could put the finishing touches on the text.

Although our fears of being rejected did not materialize with this paper, writing with love still makes us vulnerable in so many ways. When we are unable to write we get anxious and scared because we know that our academic lives depend on it. And we are well aware that producing words makes us susceptible to criticism. It takes courage to continue practicing writing in a manner that feels meaningful. Courage does not mean lack of fear or vulnerability, however. It means that we continue to write with love, despite being vulnerable. It is about learning to show up for writing, and to take responsibility for it even with the presence of doubt and fear. For all these reasons we have decided to love.

**Discussion**

Bell and Sinclair (2014) call for reclaiming love as *energy* in academic work and argue that it is “manifest when ‘sharing deeply any pursuit with another person’ or experiencing a ‘fearless’ and embodied capacity for joy; or the deep feeling that may be present when writing or exploring an idea” (p. 269). Love is playful and unpredictable. For us, love is not only energy. Although suppressed for different reasons, it is a *longing* for knowledge, harmony and spiritual growth that we all share (Lund, 2015). Academic writing as love is fundamental and mundane. This means that it does not translate into passion alone.

Passionate commitment to academic work (with a tendency to ignore how neoliberal universities repress academics’ autonomy) is sometimes referred to as romantic love (Clarke et al, 2012). This resembles the delusion that McRobbie (2016) talks about in relation to so-called creative work. She argues that *passionate work* can be seen as a neoliberal delusion where people’s affective attachment to work that they consider creative is used to normalize the irregularity and lack of security in this work. A discourse of passion involves disavowal of social and collective engagements while perpetuating individualization. Passion in neoliberal society, then, makes up for the lack of security and operates as a means of production where workers are programmed to be enthusiastic and uncomplaining. A discourse of passion acquires a form that co-exists with other practices of soft compulsion, directing academics to do what counts in evaluation exercises (Parker and Weik, 2014). In contrast, the love we advocate in and for academic writing is more about staying true to our ideals even when facing the fear of marginalization and exclusion.

For love to reach full expression it requires an academic environment that supports epistemic and social diversity and justice – the free creative play of thoughts, knowledge and bodies. As an environment dominated by the (masculine) ideals of rationality and competition, academia seems to be remarkably loveless. It is not a safe environment for writing with dedication. As writers we learn sooner or later that we will not only have to reveal our writing, but face criticism that is sometimes fierce. We are supposed to open up and share our work enthusiastically and sincerely – yet, we know that at some point we will be expected to defend our writing from cruel attacks (Gabriel, 2010). Academic writers have become “fearful clerks,” as Parker (2014: 216) comments with some sarcasm. While academics differ in how they experience this vulnerability or how much it influences their experience of writing, the presence of vulnerability cannot be avoided (cf. Hayot, 2014). The crucial point is to expose “the vulnerable self who engages in writing” (Townley, 1994: 27) and to embrace vulnerability and turn it into courage (hooks, 2000).

We argue that for these reasons love for writing is desperately needed. Writing is intellectually, physically, and emotionally demanding. The academic writer needs faith, discipline, dedication, and practice. Writers need to learn to let go, and trust themselves and the circumstances enough to let (what seem like) unfinished ideas appear on paper. Love needs to be found somehow, but the academic environment does not offer many opportunities for this. Hegemonic discourse assumes that writing happens more or less automatically. Academic writing is typically considered a controlled and controllable activity where there is no room for the “soft” and sensual (Bell and Sinclair, 2014). The academic writer feels pressure to fit the unspoken ideal of a cool, objective, and detached scientist without the immediate need for support or acceptance of others. We produce words for the critical eyes of our peers, knowing that the role of the academic reader is, above all, to spot weaknesses in our work. Hence, writing requires courage that goes beyond the cognitive or intellectual – or even the embodied and sensuous. This is because writing relates to how we see ourselves; writing is about identity (Antoniou and Moriarty, 2008). We are thus advised to “armor” ourselves, and if not anything else, “get rejected in style” (Parker, 2014: 224).

We advocate *love for* *academic writing both as practice and in practice*. This shifts the focus from texts to writing as a process (see also e.g. Dane, 2011; Helin, 2017; Meier and Wegener, 2017). We seek to encourage discussion on academic writing so that it reflects the multi-faceted experiences of writers and of writing as embodied, sensuous, emotional, social, and involving the identities of those who write. Besides promoting an academic culture where it is natural to talk about writing openly, we envision an academia where the love of writing is cultivated (Bell and Sinclair 2014). Love revives something that is hidden under the guise of hegemonic managerialist discourse (cf. Grey, 2010; Macdonald and Kam, 2007; Willmott, 2011). We pay attention to writing as craft and promote the view that everyone can develop their relationship to writing and their skills as writers by doing it regularly (Antoniou and Moriarty, 2008). Approaching academic writing as a craft means that it can be learned; one can develop with dedication and practice.

Sennett (2008) notes that the intellectual worker is a craftsman just like the carpenter. Both are dedicated to *doing good work for its own sake*, even when the organizational context does not expect this or support them in this pursuit. Sennett (2008: 9) writes: “Every good craftsman conducts a dialogue between concrete practices and thinking; this dialogue evolves into sustaining habits, and these habits establish a rhythm between problem solving and problem finding.” To love writing, then, is to approach it with care and commitment and the will to learn the skills and judgment that it takes to do a job that one can be proud of. As such, we wish to distance ourselves from (the discourse of) passion that may be associated with love. In a similar vein, McRobbie (2016) discusses craft as an alternative to the way creative work is framed through individual(ized) passion. Following the work of Sennett (2008), she distances herself from the language of genius, talent, and competition. McRobbie offers a vision for creative work that is less grandiose and more about sense and sensibility for the work itself.

In this spirit, to love academic writing is to make it social (again). We need each other to practice our love for writing. It is a collective endeavor, even when we write texts on our own (Cloutier, 2016; Parker, 2014). We can support each other in concrete ways by sharing incomplete texts and helping each other to make them better. We can make it safer to be vulnerable and distance ourselves from the fear-based culture of harsh criticism (Gabriel, 2010). We can share our writing process, progress, and setbacks – not only the laudable fruits of our labor, the published work. We can be there for each other all the way. The primary solution to the various challenges in loving writing is both mundane and fundamentally transformative. For individual writers, the solution lies in showing up; of having the courage to write regularly, in small steps, in the face of doubt and fear. However, while “self-love is the foundation of our loving practice” (hooks, 2000: 157), it is not enough. Choosing love is choosing to live in a community (ibid.). The solution is to allow for love to be explicitly present when we encounter others.

Making academic writing social (again) can be theorized in many ways. One way is to see it as nurturing an *ethic of care* to counterbalance the ethic of domination (hooks, 2000) and criticism (Gabriel, 2010: 771). Such an ethic is grounded in commitment to treat each other with respect and consideration, acknowledging our mutual dependence. This caring is based on a more or less shared idea of what care constitutes in practice (Gherardi and Rodeschini, 2016). The key is to create a context of work in which care can emerge. But why not go a step further, like bell hooks (2000), and advocate an *ethic of love*? The premise for this is that care and love are not synonymous (like passion and love are not). An ethic of love is far-reaching: a “return to love in the face of societal reticence and resistance” (Vachhani, 2015: 155), based on a commitment to develop socially just communities, like Martin Luther King Jr. in his “decision” to love. The question is how academics governed by neoliberal universities and their logics can trust themselves and their conditions of work enough to collectively embrace an ethic of love. It is not easy, to say the least, because “the patient labor of craft is likely to remain a distant ideal for freelancers working on a piece-rate system and having to cut corners” (McRobbie, 2016: 158).

Finally, reflections on our joint writing process lead us to a question that is fundamental for understanding academic writing in the light of love. It is about the masculine and the feminine, men and women, and gender. The bodies and positions from which we write matter. “Writing love has been designated a gendered and, indeed, feminine subject where discourses of love are both associated with women but also used against them” (Vachhani, 2015: 151). We, the two authors of this paper, write from different positions and bodies. One of us is a female writing coach, while the other is a male professor. This may impart a gendered power dynamic to our writing, although we have not felt it in writing this paper, perhaps due to our shared interest in the activity of writing and our long experience in working together. Also, while love is typically associated with the feminine, male bodies are not per se an obstacle for practicing love: “Writing the feminine and the body invoke ways that women *and* men can explore and reclaim their bodies and their subjectivities” (Phillips et al, 2014: 321; our italics). As women and men we can together combat patriarchy – and the prevalent form of aggressive and competitive masculinity in academia – in and through our writing.

In advocating love we are perhaps inevitably evoking a form of feminine and we face the incredibly strong masculine conventions of academia. Writing differently, then, is about crossing and blurring genres, and bringing in emotion (qua art and storytelling) to the craft that is academic writing. Ultimately, viewing writing in the light of love is to unleash its potential to disrupt the masculine order (see e.g. Bell and Sinclair, 2014; Ferguson and Jónasdóttir, 2014; Phillips et al, 2014; Pullen 2006; Vachhani, 2015). It is about engaging in gender politics and approaching writing in a way that destabilizes gender dualisms in academia. That is why writing with love is not soft, but so very hard.

**Coda**

This paper shows how difficult it is to communicate embodied, sensuous, and emotional experience on the surface of the text. Masculine conventions of academic knowledge production are difficult to challenge: “by writing in a genre suitable for academic publication we inevitably find ourselves participating … in the very forms of writing that we seek to contest” (Phillips et al, 2014: 315). Writing differently (Grey and Sinclair, 2006), in friendship (Townley, 1994), with resonance (Meier and Wegener, 2017), and opening up for alternatives (Phillips et al, 2014) is a balancing act. In discussing writing and resonance, Meier and Wegener (2017: 195) describe struggles in balancing academic conventions “with a quest for making our texts live.” We have felt these struggles. It is hard to let ourselves write about and with love and still adhere to the established conventions of journal articles.

Love offers a language to talk about vulnerability and courage, and this has important implications for learning. Viewing writing in the light of love helps us to learn more about our activities as writers of management and to deal with the struggles that are perhaps inevitably related to writing. Love helps us to understand concepts in cognitive writing research and training in a new light. In the light of love, self-efficacy (Bruning and Kauffman, 2016) is about the capacity for courage and self-love, motivation (Nelson, 2007) is about finding meaning in the act of writing, and writing strategies (Boice, 1990; Lavelle and Zuercher, 2001) are ways to understand oneself and one’s connections to readers and other writers. Viewing writing in this way provides a basis for discussing the writing process in post-graduate and doctoral education in ways that resonate with the varied experiences of people who are expected to produce publishable article manuscripts but struggle with the act of writing. Treating writing as something to be loved can be a liberating experience; it encourages individual writers to create a writing habit that works for them (Antoniou and Moriarty, 2008). However, academic writing as love is also about the community where writing takes place and collectively developing conditions where people can find it meaningful to write with dedication every day.

This leads us to the question of context. In writing this paper we have not given our readers a clear indication of our geographic location. This is because our intention was not to draw attention to specific circumstances that make particular forms of love possible in a given local setting. While these circumstances matter for the act of writing, we believe that the experiences and concerns that we share in this paper are recognizable in the context of neoliberal universities in the Global North and beyond (Slaughter and Leslie, 2001). In all its imperfection, viewing academic writing in the light of love can be a source of personal inspiration as well as a way to challenge the masculine hegemony in academic writing, although this is likely to take different forms across localities. Particular socio-historical and societal conditions gave rise to hooks’ (2000) ethic of love that is grounded in the conviction that love is the practice of justice and freedom. This idea(l) resonates with the experiences of people like us, who live our lives in very different societal conditions.

We are not implying that love conquers all. Not all those who do academic work have the same opportunities to find time and space to love writing and to write with love. We are all entangled in the power relations of academia and in the politics of publication and prestige. Some obstacles to love are systemic and difficult to overcome. For example, there remains a distinctly gendered element in what writing is rewarded in academia and what is marginalized and silenced. In the end, viewing academic writing as love may be more about confusing the hegemonic masculine order rather than attempting to replace it with another (feminine) one (Phillips et al, 2014). One of the reviewers for this paper asked: *“Can I afford to love writing?”* We assume this was not so much a question to us, but a more general reflection on the conditions of possibility and the politics of representation in academia. What makes it possible to love writing is something that many who read this paper are likely to think about. All we can say is that it may always be a struggle of some sort and it involves courageous choices. But we will never know if we do not give it a chance.

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1. *Love* is typically associated with feelings, attitudes, and states of mind that are related to interpersonal affection. Ancient Greek has four distinct words for love: *agape* (unconditional love), *eros* (passionate love), *philia* (love in friendship), and *storge* (affectionate love). However, the word love attains multiple meanings across languages and cultures, and in many languages different words distinguish between various forms and aspects of love. Love has also been treated in different ways across academic fields such as biology, philosophy, psychology, evolutionary psychology, and psychoanalysis. In organization and management studies love has been used, for example, to make sense of how followers relate to charismatic leaders (Parry and Kempster, 2014), how and why people generate loyalty and affection to organizations (Sims, 2004), and how academics draw upon narratives of love in accounting for their experiences (Clarke et al, 2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)