02/08/19

I’m so dang tired. I had a decent little hole-up work focus earlier this week, and then the past 2 days other obligations dragged me out of that and onto campus. I kind of hated it, the distraction and “necessary” time taken up by things that brought me 0% closer to finishing my dissertation. I need to get there. I’m close, kind of. I want to get an ugly complete draft together ASAP. It’s particularly hard when feedback from Dan often involves dredging up code and adding new little bits to the analysis itself. What if I could just close R down and leave it alone for these last 3 weeks? It’s shockingly hard to switch modes; it’s like I can hear my mental gears churning, brakes squealing, my giant turning radius smashing me into the curb. Dramatic, but it feels dramatic. Especially now that somehow I finally have a sense of what a good, focused work flow can feel like. There’s almost a high to it, to the intensity and focus and seeing things tick off my to-do list. Maybe I haven’t felt this way in a long time, since labwork was demanding and I could (had to) really focus on that. I guess there’s an aspect of urgency that can push me, maybe in useful ways. But damn, it comes at such a cost. I feel like the rest of me is so folded into itself, so shut down and in hibernation. What a weird place to be.

02/07/19

There’s a strange phase in the process of constantly-and-only working where it starts to feel more natural, easier. It’s a sort of comfortable complacency. Maybe an adjustment to the new normal.

I’m itching badly to make a blog when I’m done with all this. A place to express my grievances with the graduate program, to share my personal journey in finishing my dissertation, to offer some empathy and/or advice for people still going through it. And to communicate some science. And to test whether I do really like writing as a chosen form of work. Seems important.

Fun self care I’ve incorporated into my dissertation writing schedule:

* Continuing to breathe
* Sleeping almost 8 hours a night
* Drinking water
* Sometimes eating actual meals
* Bathing at least every 3 days
* Putting on pants at least once every 2 days

01/29/19

Yesterday I cleaned up my results + methods + figure captions and sent them all to Dan, who also shared them with Parvathy. That felt like a huge step & an accomplishment. It also pushed my comfort, in showing something that didn’t feel completely formed to the best of my ability. But in the interest of completing this degree, I think I have to make these pushes. And in response to another email from Dan yesterday, I sent along my introduction outline. That is \*very\* full of random thoughts and half-formed ideas and a messy structure, so that felt extra scary to me. But damn it, I did it. And I started the coi1/ npr1 GWA for Parvathy. It felt like a really productive day. And it was.

But, from Sunday into yesterday morning, I was feeling down. Tired, stretched thin, sad, overwhelmed. I didn’t stop too much to think about why, I just pushed through. And attributed it to dating causes: Bobby asking me for time I had already intended to/ planned to spend with SeanR, my ongoing feeling of loss and hopelessness about rebuilding with Lauren and with SeanF, my fear of losing SeanR’s attention and falling low on his long list of priorities. These things are stressors, but they are not why I feel so distressed. The work is heavy. I have been working for years at this, and I am rightfully tired. I have not been able to choose much about my work environment, and much of it I find unfulfilling, stressful, and meaningless. I feel uncertainty about my future, a certain listlessness in having no plans for after, no idea of what I will find to do with my time. This degree has been my direction and my life for so long. Finishing will be a big change, and I don’t know how to feel quite ready.

I let this stress mount up as I industriously tried to keep working on Monday. But today it crashed around me. I awoke feeling low, and as the morning progressed, I felt lower. I cried a few times, and only got out of bed to make it to therapy. Therapy helped, some: I’m going to try verbalizing my distress, putting my finger on it and turning it into words. Not just letting it quietly build until I need to erupt in tears and try to wash it away. Crying is fine and good and cleansing, but it is even better if I do not need to cry so often. I did not work today. I felt a keen need to decompress, to step back, to breathe. So I caught up on some emails and phone chores. I snuggled and napped with SeanR. I went for a run. I cooked a quick dinner and watched TV and cuddled. I went to yoga. And, best distraction of all, Bobby and SeanR and I booked tickets to Japan right at the end of the quarter. I’m not sure how I will pay for it, but I will make it work. I am going to juice it as motivation as thoroughly as I can… a trip is coming! It is exciting and wonderful! I can EARN IT.

I guess I need to nail some things down. Schedule a date for going into the grad studies office to file. Figure out that whole process, really. Get ready to actually do it.

But, first and foremost, write some of my fucking introduction tomorrow. Like at least a page. Yeah??

01/27/19

I’m working an okay amount but holding myself to the writing is hard. I’m trying to muster just enough urgency about the looming deadline that it’ll nudge me forward without making me anxious or panicked. I don’t know how I’m doing. This weekend felt rough- trying to do fun things but feeling rushed, like I needed to stay busy, frustrated, pulled to work. But then sitting down to work and not wanting to, drifting mentally, failing to maintain focus. The mental health book is currently on mindfulness exercises and meditation, so at least I have some direction in how to work on that.

Dating stuff has felt like a frustrating pull, too. I want to maintain energy and focus but I feel lots of irritation and discomfort in my relationships. I’m grumpy, closed, moody, and then blame myself for acting that way. I guess I’m working on acceptance of my foul moods. I just need to keep on keeping on. I’m almost there! I have a fairly complete draft of the results and methods of my last chapter! The introduction and discussion don’t have to be good, right? Tomorrow I’m going to try to clean up the results a bit more, edit figure titles, and then word vomit some more intro/ discussion. I just need words on the page to help convince me that something is happening. And later this week I can read through collaborator papers to pull what I actually want for the results + intro + discussion.

01/24/19

It’s been a minute. I think my writing minimums are too modest right now, my daily work schedule too relaxed. I did give my exit seminar last week, but it’s 9 days later and that seems like plenty of break. My only excuse / reason is my usual mental health issues. Feeling anxiety every time I dig into data analysis, even though I now know it’s silly and just an artifact and I should be able to emotionally let go of it right now. I don’t know… my body still just tenses right up and I sort of collapse into myself. Tight breathing, knotted stomach, hunched shoulders, strained neck, cloudy mind, aching in hands and feet. It’s hard to let go. I definitely need more exercise than I’ve been getting this week- for whatever reason I’ve prioritized cuddles and contact and socializing and fun distractions. Sometimes that’s actually what I need, but right now it may not be.

So, I’ll ramp it up. Minimum of 250 words on the “slow” or busy days. 500 on the focused writing days.

I gave my exit seminar last week. And it went really well. My mom, stepdad, and sister showed up and my parents got to meet Dan. Sean, Lauren, Sean, and Bobby showed up- all of my partners! Kaitlin, Ken, Kenzie, and Kelsey (omg just realized it’s all Ks) showed up- my polyamorous, SeanR-adjacent support group! Everyone said it went well. Dan complimented me in front of the audience on the scale of the research and balancing two lives (that he knows of)- my dissertation and my science communication. Dan and Takao were there, mostly quiet, but Takao seemed genuinely interested. The first- and second-years wrote me lovely, glowing reviews that felt really nice. I told my therapist Laura Shlien about all of it and she is very pleased and proud of me. She is encouraging me to recognize and acknowledge the good, and my successes. It’s so easy to downplay. But I am proud of the exit seminar, I worked very hard at it, and was so nervous for the practice session. But walking into the real thing, I felt ready to confront it head-on. I felt comfortable, which is surprising. It flew by. And it gave me some confidence, that I can really do this, that people are rooting for me, that we all believe I can pull off the PhD.

Now I just have to finish the damn writing. And find a job. It all feels so close, but so far, so set but so ephemeral. I don’t think I’ll know I’m at the end before it just… happens.

In the mean time, I’m trying to take care of myself. I’m trying to focus. I miss having my own friends, and socializing much. My romantic relationships are in a fizzle, as I draw energy in to focus on myself. But I’m surviving. And growing in ways that are both essential and beneficial. I am so grateful to be working on mental health with Laurel, holding each other accountable to growth.

12/06/18

750 words / start 12:26pm / end 12:55pm

I gave lab meeting and it went well. I opted in to meet with Dan Runcie separately the Monday after. It all went fine. I should actually follow up on the ideas that Dan suggested to me, but so far I’ve mostly put them aside. It’s one of those semi-frustrating moments when I’m skeptical of an answer Klieb seems satisfied with, where I want to dig in and try another method to convince myself (and future reviewers?) that our methods are valid and our results make sense. Then again, maybe that’s the kind of analysis I should add into the manuscript later, if the dissertation chapter is being developed into a manuscript for publication. Maybe I only have 3 reviewers I need to impress at this point, and it’s the Dans and Takao. Then again, do I need to try some of it to appease Runcie? I don’t know him well enough to know how tightly he holds onto things. I would hope he’d support whatever Klieb wants to do to get me out the door… but I don’t know for sure. Anxious waffling ensues. I’ll probably not actually work on his suggestions, just keep letting them quietly nibble at my confidence. For that reason alone, it could be worth a look. Hopefully it won’t take ages to pull off.

So now all I have left is the exit seminar, and writing the damn thing. I’m feeling more motivated to stare at the exit seminar than the writing. I guess it’s okay to go with that- it feels more urgent, and maybe once I have a draft I can let it sit for a minute until I get a seminar date from Stacey. It’s not Dan’s priority, but at least it’s me doing work that needs to happen.

When I first opened up the tomato talk to copy slides over, I felt overwhelmed and undirected. The last time I presented on it was ages ago, in terms of the layers of edits I forced the manuscript through. Who knows if any of my data slides are useful as-is. Who knows if I’ll have to redraw them all in color. But it also feels good to have a presentation that’s way too long (let’s see, 100 slides right now! Oops!) and know that it’s just editing and culling and refining my script and transitions that needs to happen. No major new chunks to throw in.

After seeing Alex’s exit talk I’m having some anxiety/ remorse over my work feeling too simple and repetitive. Which is a little wild- it’s been plenty of work and plenty hard for me. But his talk (to me) looked like an impressive array of different techniques, in which he developed tons of skillsets in service of one big, exciting (to him) research question. But maybe that’s okay, for me to see that contrast. Alex is smart, but he also likes his work and wants to continue in this type of research. It’s okay if my dissertation looks a little simplistic or boring from my own perspective- I’m merely trying to get done and get out. And I don’t even intend to continue in this work. So, for real this time, Enough is Enough.

Here goes trying to write some kind of story about Botrytis to frame the exit talk.

1. Plant pathogens are classically defined by a few of their lifestyle traits, including the extent to which they specialize for survival on only a single host species or clade (obligate relationship), versus live as generalists with a wide range of suitable hosts. Additionally, pathogens are described by the mechanisms by which they infect and feed upon their host plants. Necrotrophs XX something about killing tissue as they consume cells, brush up on this XX and biotrophs XX living tissue XX. Botrytis cinerea is interesting in that it is intermediate between biotroph and necrotroph, but also because it is an extreme generalist.
   1. Necrotrophs can infect living tissues, and extract nutrients from dead or senescing plant materials

Botrytis cinerea is one member of a genus of fungal plant pathogens. However, because all of my research focuses on this species, I’ll refer to this pathogen as Botrytis for short throughout the remainder of my talk.

1. Botrytis cinerea is an extreme generalist in that it can infect hosts throughout the plant kingdom. The majority of its hosts are within the eudicots, but Botrytis is pathogenic on hosts as distantly related as (pine? Spruce?) and (mosses?) This poses several biological questions, including, what about this pathogen facilitates such an exceptionally broad host range?
2. There are several hypotheses for the biology of an extreme generalist.
   1. One hypothesis predicts a sort of silver bullet gene, /750/ which would effectively disarm conserved plant defenses across many species. Diversity would be low, as this gene would not need to specialize.
   2. Alternately, the pathogen may be specialized to particular hosts, but at the isolate level rather than the species level. Individuals may specialize to different hosts, such that on the pathogen species level, it appears to have general host targets.
   3. Finally, the generalist pathogen may specialize at the allelic level. This would account for a highly diverse isolate, in which unique alleles are optimized for attack of different host species.

By the way, we work with Botrytis individuals as single-spore isolates collected from individual host tissues. As such, to refer to a genetically distinct individual of Botrytis, I will use the term “isolate”.

1. Previous work from our research group negates some of these hypotheses.
   1. First, genetic variation for measures of Botrytis virulence is highly quantitative, which negates the hypothesis of a single silver bullet gene with minimal diversity.
   2. For example, in our collection of 96 Botrytis isolates, the host from which we isolated each Botrytis genotype was not a major factor determining the genetic distance of the isolates. This suggests that individual isolates are not specialized to particular hosts, but that Botrytis is a generalist even at the individual level.
   3. Third, we find that the geography of where Botrytis individuals were isolated does not predict the genetic distance between them. This lack of isolation-by-distance hints at a panmictic population, with common interbreeding between diverse isolates.
2. Together, our evidence so far seems to rule out the hypothesis of a single universally-effective virulence gene, or the hypothesis of specialization at the isolate level. This leads us to the hypothesis of allele specialization: which genes have allelic variation that contribute to virulence on specific hosts, or subsets of hosts?

11/16/18

Sacramento and Davis have been blanketed in smoke from the Camp Fire for days… UC Davis campus has been closed from Tuesday – Friday this week. It has me feeling melancholy (extra?) and tired and lazy. I’ve mostly worked from home all week, though today I changed it up and headed to SeanR’s work. The change of space and office type environment kind of helped. I like working at home, but maybe not every day for weeks on end.

I’m at a weird moment. I’ve had some momentum in trying to rush to finish by December, but we recently extended my deadline to March. And I’m tiring of the job application phase, with so few interviews or responses. I want to maintain the momentum but am not really feeling it- feeling some fatigue, but more than that, I’m feeling malaise and apathy. Ideally I’d have some looming new assignment that helps me value this phase as my only focused writing opportunity… but it’s hard to fool myself into thinking this exists.

Plus, there’s this annoying level of mini-deadlines pushing certain projects forward. It’s looking like I’ll need to give lab meeting on 11/30, so I need to push figure generation. But what I want to be doing right now, oddly, is writing. And even figure generation was slowed down- by a job application deadline, a job interview, a science communication day, reading through Dan’s new grant proposal, reading through Vivian’s paper draft. I take longer than needed to do these tasks when they’re not what I want. Therefore delaying even further on the work I care about in the moment. I’m not sure how best to balance these things. Maybe I can (oddly) reward myself for doing the yucky work efficiently by scheduling a block of the work I want to do? I don’t know.

11/10/18

On Saturday I attended a workshop on dissertation writing, titled “getting started – getting done”. And it was and wasn’t very useful. The best workshop sessions I could find were in writing a literature review, and in grammatical editing. The literature review provided some nice structure and guided thinking about what I wanted for my chapter 2 introduction. But the meat of it, the strategy for how to take notes as you read, for how to do a good literature comb… I figured all of that when I wrote my masters’ thesis. And when I wrote my metabolism review paper with Dan. The grammar lecture also provided some more structure than I had previously been aware of… but the best resource offered was a handful of links to grammatical editing resources. Part way through, I realized how little information there was about what the dissertation, this great body of work, was even supposed to look like. I searched for my grad group’s guidelines, and for the guidelines of the school. There was practically nothing. No length expectations, no content expectations. Just a publication-quality body of work that indicates that the student has the ability to conduct independent research. So I asked Lauren if her department had guidelines… she recommended checking out the dissertations of previous students. I did- Jason’s, Rachel’s, Jenna Gallegos’. They were, for the most part, shorter than I expected. Jenna’s had only 2 data chapters. So I came away from the day with something- a bit more certainty that I know as much about this process as I can, given where I am along the way. That I’m not missing some big piece. That the work I plan to complete will be sufficient. That the only real block between me and the end is, well, me. It comes down to my willingness and motivation to complete the work. The skills are there. They have to be.

11/09/18

Less writing this week. I backed off a little bit on writing for its own sake. We finally heard from Suzi and got her Botrytis genome manuscript. I realized that it basically should have been published 2 years ago. I’m a teeeensy bit irritated at her for holding us data-hostage. I want a lot of her data for follow-up analysis on my stuff (or at least for Celine’s sake for the eudicot stuff) but question how much she’ll ever share. I hope she’s okay, whatever is going on.

Also, I had health (IUD) problems which made for 4 doctor’s appointments this week. Holy hell. Lauren reminded me to consider all of this “work time” to stave off the guilt and feel productive. So there we are. Hot yoga felt super good- I was more awake, more calm, kinda energized after the class. But every day is hard right now and seems to involve crying or emotional distress at some point. I’m a little exhausted.

I’ve committed (today) to the 6 day trip to Oman and feel pretty darn surreal about it. So far I’m pretending it’s not happening. I need a strategy to notify Dan of it when he’s back after next week. I’m thinking I’ll call it another wedding. Close enough? I AM committing to a) getting enough sleep b) working in transit c) being responsible. Sure, 3 days off I can do. Not a full 6.

In the good work news, the tomato resubmission is ready to go. I need to upload it tomorrow and then poof! I will not touch it again for a bit. Hope to GODS that it gets accepted this time. My fragile little psyche needs it.

Plus, completed some data analysis for the eQTL paper and had plenty of new thoughts. But ugh, I wish I could convince myself that this method is valid.

I \*am\* feeling more comfy with letting Dan in on my thoughts as they happen, less protective of my work and ideas. Less anxious about whether I’m working enough (cause I’m working just about as much as I can manage). Here’s hoping I can keep it up.

11/05/18

I decided that devoting time to catchup on chores etc. on the weekends is fine. It has to happen, and weekends are the best time for that. So on Sunday I did just that- house cleaning, turtle tank, voted, cooked a little. Caught up on emails. Worked on job apps a bit. Went for a walk.

Misplaced my notebook at home or at SeanR’s. Urgh. I’ll make a little to-do list on wunderlist.

Thoughts from yoga class last night on how to get p-values (SNP effects) for the Top At (Bc < top hits = 0) / Top Bc (At < top hits = 0) SNP lists? Ideally, as follows (using top At hits as example):

1. Read in each transcript GWA for Bc genes
2. Get p-value for all SNPs from the At list
3. If transcript 1, keep these values. If transcript > 1, keep only max value between current & previous. Match on SNP+Chr location.
4. Now, you should have the max SNP fx at each of those loci.

This would be a bit time-intensive, but worthwhile I think.

So… somehow rand2 is identical to the (old) rand1?? Checked phenotype inputs (FAM files) as well as association file outputs for individual (randomized) gene profiles. They are identical between rand1 and rand2, though rand2 certainly ran independently (a month later). I re-randomized phenotypes for rand2 and now am re-running GEMMA for these.

FYI, this probably means that sample() in R starts from the same seed each time. BE CAREFUL OF THIS. Fortunately, permutations 1 and 3:5 were unique from each other.

11/03/18

Already weekends are harder and more tiring. I’m finding it difficult to chug along with work without regretting missing the weekends as time to catch up on chores + snuggles + downtime + socializing + job applications + scicomm work. This balance feels difficult. I’m sticking to my minimums for now though—compliance is, oddly, the only thing keeping me complying. Just intense adherence to arbitrary rules.

I finished the permutations and I’m not exactly sure what to do with them. First thought is manhattan plot all 5. Just take a look to see how consistent they are. Take the max (100% threshold) across ALL of them. Do I have any SNPs above this for the actual data? If not, how about the 99.9% threshold? Who cares if it’s imprecise as heck. It’s just a first look.

But then, how do I want to summarize across all 5? Manhattan plot of the max value per SNP? Sure. Or maybe some sort of sliding window mean +- SE line across the genome, to get a sense of the variation and where our real hits land. IDK.

11/02/18

I’m starting a dissertation journal to keep me writing, even on the data analysis days. I’m trying to impose structure: to find a way to feel accomplished on a regular basis, to track actual progress toward a nebulous goal, to nudge myself toward staying focused and productive even on the bad days. I’m only 5 days in but so far it’s helping.

Writing so far feels empty, as normal. The plots I have so far are a little too sketchy- I don’t feel confident in calling patterns of hotspots without the thresholding done. I’m worrying over the problem of thousands of statistical tests – does a 5x permutation feel sufficient? I might try calculating an FDR correction just to help me feel confident… that none of my SNP hits are real. Haha.

Also I still can’t trust my R results at first pass, but maybe I’m getting better at troubleshooting through plotting. Or at being skeptical of my results in a semi-productive way. Hopefully.

I’m still afraid that I have a huge blind spot in this project. I’m partially reading the literature to convince myself that GWA to find “eQTL” for the full transcriptome is anything other than crazy. That damn multiple-testing problem. I feel like I should do some sort of informed pre-selection of which transcripts to examine, or which SNPs to include. It bothers me to not first a) select for only the transcripts with significant *B. cinerea* genetic effects and b) split out cis-loci from trans-loci. I’m trying to trust Dan that lumping it all together and seeing what jumps out is okay. I’m not convinced. What if \*somehow\* through random chance and bad luck those transcripts with no *B. cinerea* genetics are sticking around in our top hits?

Oh wait, I could test that. I’m going to look at which transcripts end up in my \*highly significant SNP associations\* club and see how they looked in Wei’s heritability data. DO IT.