

Women and Research

Mission statement

To foster an active and inclusive research environment in order to enhance high quality research output



Issue 1, 2016

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From The Pen Of Angela

Dear Researchers,

Hello and welcome to the first Women and Research newsletter for 2016!

I've been thinking about writing practices for a while now, and this morning my Facebook feed shows two of my academic friends currently working in coffee shops. So, where do you do your best writing? Mine is in my home office. My desk is large, with pull out side-panels that offer extra space for all the journals I am drawing from. I can play music (mostly instrumental but a variety of genres), hear the birds and make my own carefully constructed frothy milk coffees.

As part of my writing challenge group we work through Wendy Laura Belcher's book *Writing Your Journal Article in 12 Weeks*. The first part of this brilliant resource is all about distractions and the little tricks we engage within ourselves to postpone or be side tracked from writing.

I start the day with my *to do* list; comprised of specific sub-tasks. For example, the second one on today's list is to write a revised abstract for a R&R manuscript. I find that the more specific I am with the tasks the better I am at completing them.

It's not enough for me to write 'work on manuscript for submission to that journal' but to outline each section that requires work and specify the work to be completed. I don't simply note that I will be working on the literature review section, but will state that the task is to update the literature by bringing a new theoretical perspective to it. Or developing a conceptual framework to add clarity to the overall argument for the paper.

Starting the day (or work session) with a *to do*

list is described as '*parking the car on the hill*' by Thinkwell (for more information on Thinkwell please visit their website here: <http://www.ithinkwell.com.au/>). It is a mental picture I quite like, the idea of starting more effectively, of getting a head start, that is attractive. I find it very motivating, especially when combined with that exhilarating feeling of ticking things off the list!

These activities, and understanding where I do my best writing, have improved my productivity. It comes down to working smarter, a cliché, but a true one all the same. Understanding how I can work more productively has also has benefits for my confidence too.

This issue we focus on confidence and conferences. Dr Swee Hoon Chuah, President of the Women and Research group here in the School of Economics, Finance and Marketing, talks about a recent Women and Research group hosted mini-workshop. The topic was confidence and, in particular, the courage to be confident. Dr Chuah provides interesting information about overcoming barriers, the need to engage in behaviours that are advantageous in the workplace and how we women can help ourselves.

Next we hear from Tri Le and Tony Cooper, both PhD students who recently attended their very first academic conference as presenters. Remember how excited you felt the very first time your paper was accepted? Tri and Tony tell us of their experiences and offer suggestions for those considering attending a conference, and how to prepare to get the most out of the endeavour.

Warm regards, *Angela*

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Previous Issues

[http://angeladobele.com/
WomenAndResearch.php](http://angeladobele.com/WomenAndResearch.php)

There is a gender gap at the top echelons of academia

Institutional and structural changes are slowly closing this gap but there is much women can do to help themselves in the more immediate term

Women can further close this gap...

...by improving their self-confidence

The Courage to be Confident by Dr Swee Hoon Chuah

The Women and Research (WAR) group at the School of Economics, Finance & Marketing kicked off its 2016 activities with a mini-workshop focusing on confidence. In particular, it focuses on the courage to be confident. Courage is the ability to act in the presence of fear. Why would women fear being confident?

In Australian universities, although the number of women students and academic staff outnumber men, women remain a minority at the senior academic levels of D and E [4]. This phenomenon is not unique to Australia. In the UK, for example, since the early 2000s one-third of PhDs have been awarded to women and 45% of the academic workforce are comprised of women. Yet

women hold only 20% of professorships in UK universities [1]. This gender gap at the top echelons of academia reflects the business world generally. Research has mainly attributed this gap to institutional and structural biases, such as gender barriers in the form of the baby penalty, everyday sexism in the workplace and the “old boy” networks [5]. These are external barriers that we are all actively lobbying to change. While these institutional and structural changes are slowly taking place in the long run, we women can help ourselves in the more immediate term by tackling the psychological factors that contribute to this gap. We can effect change by working to overcome the internal barriers that hold us back. Central to this is the role of self-confidence.



Maria Di Pietro and some of the participants at the mini-workshop 17/03/2016

In the book *The Confidence Code*, authors Shipman and Kay attribute the gender gap in top positions to our lower confidence compared to men, particularly in male-dominated workplaces [2]. As a result, we fall behind when it comes to engaging in behaviours that are advantageous in the workplace. For example, we are reluctant to self-promote and put ourselves forward for senior positions; we bargain less assertively for salary increases and/or other rewards; and we underestimate our skills and knowledge, resulting in us speaking up less in meetings and appearing less confident when presenting our work [3,5]. These are areas we have control over; here we do not need external systems to change for things to improve. We can start by working on ourselves if we want to get ahead. We need to build our self-confidence and take responsibility for our own careers [1]. We need to put ourselves forward for promotions and/or senior positions; we need to take opportunities to sit on boards; once there, we need to speak up, be heard and make valuable contributions. We need to be assertive in our interactions. All of which are easier said than done, of course.

As women, we are bounded by society's stereotypical view of us as caring, collectivistic and interdependent, as opposed to the view of men as aggressive, individualistic and independent. As a woman, when we engage in self-promotion behaviours such as highlighting our achievements or negotiating aggressively for higher rewards, we are engaging in counter-stereotypical behaviours. Due to acculturation into such norms, society (women included) frown upon counter-stereotypical behaviours and those performing such behaviours will suffer negative backlash. Research has shown that women who are confident enough to engage in self-promoting behaviours are judged as more arrogant, more pushy, less likeable and less collegiate than men who do the same. Women are viewed as "bossy" whereas men are viewed as "boss-like" when exhibiting these same behaviours. As a result, women are penalised both socially and economically (for example, they are less likely to be

promoted) for violating society's expectations of how women should behave [3,5]. This double standard contributes to women's fears of acting confident; they are fearful that if they do, they will be perceived as overconfident or arrogant, and suffer negative backlash.

In our workshop, the speaker Maria Di Pietro, a psychologist specialising in workplace counseling, reminded us that babies are born with only two fears: of loud noises and of falling down. The rest of our fears are indoctrinated into us as we grow up by the society around us. So just as we learned our fear of violating stereotypes (and being penalised by society), we can unlearn them. Overcoming this fear allows us to be comfortable with our self-confidence, to be secure in ourselves and in our abilities. Maria discussed some mental exercises we can carry out, to train ourselves toward achieving this goal. One of these is to have self-awareness. What do we see when we look at ourselves in the mirror? Be honest. Is our view of ourselves commensurate with our abilities? If so, we can remain authentic in our confidence. An authentic form of confidence will help mitigate society's judgment of us as overconfident. A related point is that we need to recognise our weaknesses but build on our strengths. Being mediocre or poor at one or more aspects of your work does not mean that you have nothing to contribute. It is more important to look at those aspects in which you have strengths, focus and then build on those. Do what you do best and do it well. Make peace with your mediocre areas, by all means work away at them, but do not let them sap your confidence. Another point is to always act confidently, even when we are feeling nervous and uncertain. Muhammad Ali once said "To be a great champion, you must believe you are the best. If you are not, pretend you are". Maria encourages us to mentally picture ourselves as we would like to be in all our confident glory, for example dressed sharply in a suit, speaking well in perfect English, wearing a confident facial expression or standing in an upright stance, and then project these confident images onto ourselves to boost our confidence level. Another thing we can do is

Women fear to act confident

Convinced if they do, they will be perceived as overconfident or arrogant and suffer a negative backlash

Overcoming this fear allows women to be comfortable with their self-confidence; be secure in themselves and their abilities

- Have self-awareness: be honest - is your view of yourself commensurate with your abilities?
- Recognise weaknesses but build on strengths
- Act confidently, even when feeling nervous and uncertain



Dr Swee Hoon Chuah

Use or think in confident language

I can, I will!

to use or think in confident language. For example, instead of “I can’t ...” or “I will try...”, say or think “I can...” or “I will ...”. We fear overpromising (ourselves and others) when we use such confident language, but we have no incentive to try otherwise.

Obviously, due to our many years of conditioning, all these changes will not come easily or comfortably to us, but we can mentally change ourselves one step at a time. Slowly but surely, we can break down both the external and internal barriers that impede us in our career progression. Things will then improve. Research shows that when at least 15% of a leadership team is comprised of women, there is less likely to be a perception in the workplace that confident women leaders are acting counter-stereotypically [3]. So as we continue to increase our presence in the upper echelons of academia and/or management, the tendency for negative backlash against our (perceived) overconfidence will weaken.

References:

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<http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2014/feb/24/women-academia-promotion-cambridge>

[2] Kay, K. and Shipman, C. (2014), The confidence code: The science and art of self-assurance-what women should know, New York: HarperCollins

[3] Mitchell, R. (2014), “Gap or trap? Confidence backlash is the real problem for women”, The Conversation, 12/06/2014 <https://theconversation.com/gap-or-trap-confidence-backlash-is-the-real-problem-for-women-27718>

[4] Pyke, J. (2012), “Why do female academics give up on being professors?”, The Conversation, 25/05/2012 <https://theconversation.com/why-do-female-academics-give-up-on-becoming-professors-6563>

[5] Sarsons, H. and Xu, G. (2015), “Confidence gap? Women economists tend to be less confident than men when speaking outside their area of expertise”, The LSE Impact of Social Science Blog, 02/07/2015 <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2015/07/02/confidence-gap-women-economists-less-confident-than-men/>

Planning for your first PhD Conference by Mr Tri Le



Mr Tri Le

Angela asked to me to write about my experiences at my very first academic conference, ANZMAC (the Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy Conference) hosted last year by UNSW Business School in Sydney.

Writing for this newsletter reminded me of the ANZMAC welcome message of Professor Sharyn Rundle-Thiele (then President of ANZMAC) sharing her first conference story: “As poor students, we hired a car in Christchurch and took in New Zealand’s picturesque South Island sights along the way. We arrived in Dunedin to stay in student accommodation on the Sunday before ANZMAC. Three hectic days followed that involved putting a lot of names that I had read in journal papers to faces...”.

Your first conference is not only a chance to

showcase your PhD story. It is an unforgettable memory for people looking to follow an academic career. Who can forget their first conference? I still remember how excited I was when my paper was accepted! As a newbie in the community, I curiously read conference documents, carefully planned the itinerary to attend as many sessions as possible, and of course, spent much time practicing my presentation.

Research students usually spend their whole first year preparing for the proposal milestone (confirming their candidature). However some students can finish their research frameworks within a few months, and a conference provides an opportunity to submit your conceptualisations to an audience.

Looking back to my first conference, after 20

months of my PhD journey, I think a conference is a worthwhile mission and offer some tips that might help students.

Plan for it from the first day of your PhD and talk to your supervisor: For the most part, PhD students attend an academic conference at least once in their PhD life. So, why not do it as early as possible? I did not attend a conference early, because I did not plan for it. However, my friends did and I wish I had too.

The feedback received can enhance the quality of your early work and help you on the road to PhD success. The review process and Q&As in your presentation can also be very supportive. Achieving a conference paper when you reach your first milestone is a great start for your PhD and your academic career. I recommend discussing a conference plan with your supervisors.

Choose your track carefully: If your research is related to multiple areas, which is very popular today, it is a bit confusing to choose the track to submit your paper. Your supervisors will help, but you can do some quick research on the track chairs' publications and the sponsoring journals which potentially publish papers within the tracks. Also, read the track chairs' notes on their track, are they looking at particular sub-themes or have a vision for the track? It is worth knowing this information as an expert in your topic would be more helpful and give significant feedback for your research.

Study the conference schedule: Once you arrive for the conference, study the conference schedule. Conferences are a good time to explore your vision within the scientific community. I would have loved to attend all related sessions at my first

conference, but with concurrent schedules, this may be impossible. Make sure you read the conference documents carefully and know the schedule. Highlight which presentations you have to attend and which are perhaps the second priority. Plan your itinerary carefully and remember to factor in changing rooms between sessions or presentations.

Mention your limitations and ask for suggestions during your presentation: The first conference paper at PhD level, in my opinion, is unlikely to be perfect. What it is, is a great chance to acquire comments from experts; thus, you do not need to hide your limitations. Mention that sampling method that you are unsure of or ask the audience the questions you are currently wondering about. Asking your audience for their opinions is a good way to get quality feedback.

Communicate with people: Conferences are always good for networking. Besides making friends with other PhD students, you should identify experts in your field in advance. Attending their sessions might give you some ideas for your research, and asking questions in their presentations might be a good start to communication. In my case, as an international student, I was also aware of the opportunity to meet other researchers from my country and region.

Enjoy your trip: Last but not least, conferences are great for academics because we can travel and explore new cities. If you can, plan a few days after the conference to travel.

I hope you have a great time at your first conference.

To Wing is Wrong: My First Academic Conference

by Mr Tony Cooper

At the end of my first year as a PhD candidate in the School of Economics, Finance and Marketing at RMIT, I submitted my first conference paper. The conference was hosted by the University of New South Wales over three days with my presentation scheduled on the final day. What follows is a brief outline of my experience with some key learnings for those who are about to embark on a similar undertaking.

The writing:

Frankly, this was the easy part. My paper was a modified version of a research project that I

had worked on for almost two years and therefore I was very familiar with the data, I had all the materials at hand and I had an interesting story to tell. The most difficult task was condensing a substantial volume of work down to a seven page paper (including references) to suit the conference requirements. In preparing the paper I undertook an approach that I had rarely used in the past which involved simply getting my basic thoughts on paper to tell the story from top to bottom in an unrefined monologue. This contrasts with my usual approach as I tend to be obsessive when it comes to

Discuss a conference plan with your supervisors

Ask your conference audience the questions you are currently wondering about



Mr Tony Cooper

Be prepared, know what you want to get from attending

The experience can be invaluable but you will get out of it what you put in

selecting words to craft a narrative to the point where a good sentence can take a few days. The rough paper was then refined using appropriate academic language, theory and supporting citations and formatted to specification.

To my surprise this process worked very well and with a little tweaking, the paper that resulted was one that I was very proud of from a story telling point of view (how it didn't win Best Paper in its track I'll never know). :-)

Submitting the paper was not quite as straight forward as I expected. Setting up my account on the conference web site and stepping through a multi-step process seemed to me more complicated than necessary. Nevertheless, I fumbled my way through and finally clicked the submit button and sat back with a strong sense of satisfaction for a job well done. When the paper was accepted some months afterwards I knew I was on my way. 'Steak and Kidney' here I come!

The Preparation:

Meeting with my PhD supervisors several weeks ahead of the conference, the sage advice was not to over prepare, something which goes against the grain for me but guidance which was gratefully accepted nonetheless. As a consequence, not more than a few hours were spent compiling a Powerpoint presentation which seemed to cover the main points of the paper and this was tested in a run through with 'the brains trust' a couple of days prior to departure. A few gaps were identified and I assured the team that once I worked out the speech to accompany the Powerpoint, the whole thing would come together nicely.

With several years' teaching experience preceded by a long industry based career spent leading and motivating teams, I consider public speaking to be something that comes naturally and with which I have relatively few problems.

So the strategy I decided to adopt for my first major academic conference; one which brings together the recognized thought leaders from major universities across Australian and New Zealand in my discipline, was to 'wing it'.

Yes, of course, in hindsight this seems absurdly overconfident, arrogant even. But the strategy seemed to fit nicely with end of year student presentations, exam marking, results processing, team planning days, professional development seminars, major

dental surgery, a wedding anniversary and my wife's major milestone birthday (i.e. one that ends with a zero). In other words, I was busy.

Arrival:

Arriving at the hotel in Bondi following an uneventful flight from Melbourne to Sydney, one I had done a thousand times before, what happened next was, perhaps, a portent of things to come. It seems I had misread, misunderstood or miscommunicated the dates of my hotel booking and discovered that I had arranged to check out the day before my presentation rather than the day of my presentation. To make matters worse the hotel was fully booked and so too were every other hotel in the area – apparently a 'convention was taking place at the university' I was told by the kindly desk clerk. It was at this point that it occurred to me the conference was a little bigger than I had anticipated.

The Presentation:

The advantage of presenting on the last day of a conference is that you have the opportunity to sit in on a few presentations during the first two days to get a feel for the style and quality of the speakers. The quality I observed was a continuum from the not-so good to the insightful and truly engaging (the latter of which included two of my postgrad colleagues who I believe are also recounting their experiences in this newsletter).

Ironically, the advice I always offer to nervous students ahead of their presentations is be prepared – if you know your material you can't go wrong, confidence comes from preparation. And an in-depth knowledge that can only come from immersing yourself in your research was my saving grace in the delivery of my presentation which turned out to be OK without being great. The feedback that I received was benign but of limited use and probably all that I deserved.

The experience however was invaluable on many levels not the least of which was a better understanding of what constitutes preparation in the context of an academic conference. I also observed the delivery techniques of several well-polished professionals, gained insights into contemporary thinking in my field, connected with some interesting researchers and gained some great ideas for future papers. I suspect that for most of us our first experience with anything new stands out by virtue of its newness. For me, the experience stands out for different reasons.

When preparing for your first major academic conference...

Always over prepare

Epilogue:

There are, of course, several morals to my story which will be heeded by those seeking a smoother path to academic success:

- If you spend more time on wardrobe planning than you do on your Powerpoint, chances are you are under prepared;
- If you scribble a few notes on the back of your boarding pass shortly before landing, chances are you are under prepared;
- If you spend the first two days of the conference phoning round for a bed for the night, chances are you are under prepared;
- If your presentation is scheduled between the two authors you have cited most in your paper, chances are you are under prepared;
- When preparing for your first major academic conference, always over prepare.



*“Breathe. Speak well.
Leave them breathless.”*

Dr Angela Dobeles is an academic research professional with a passion for word of mouth (wom) marketing, from traditional face-to-face through to social media and electronic wom. Her research interests extend to marketing education and education issues including academic workload and student performance.

Angela is an experienced quantitative and qualitative researcher who has published 50+ papers. In the field of wom, she has contributed to the understanding of the key drivers of positive wom and the organisational strategies that facilitate it. She is currently developing a framework to assist commercial marketers improve the effectiveness of blogs and micro-blogs: building on co-creation and collaboration to communicate with loyal and passionate community members.

In the field of education Angela is currently working with Griffith University’s Professor Sharyn Rundle-Thiele to develop an understanding of the full impact of ERA and the differences in academic workload and performance on promotion.

Angela has developed strong links with industry with a commitment to bridging the relationship between practitioners and academia. Her current industry projects involve research into tourism, life insurance and blood donation.

