

My Writing Identity: A Journey of Self Discovery

Life is a journey that must be travelled. It's filled with all kinds of ups and downs and twists and turns. Nobody knows the meaning of it all. But we can create our meaning and experience it. Everyone is different, but we're still the same. We're all trying to find happiness and purpose in this chaotic existence. And before it all comes to an end, we might unravel ourselves and find out who we are.

I don't know what consciousness is. It seems to be a state of awareness and experience. There is a conscious awareness of the present moment. And there is a self within that awareness that reflects upon itself in terms of past experiences, current activities, and future anticipation (Harris 2017). Most people identify with the latter. It's all they ever know. But it's possible to become more aware of the experiential side through meditation and psychedelic experiences. Studies have shown it can make people healthier, happier and more present and focused. Still, we need a subjective self-identity to function in day-to-day life.

Consciousness is a strange phenomenon. It's been discussed since the early days of philosophy in both the eastern and western world. In the western perspective, consciousness and mind are not different and used interchangeably. Plato believed mind and soul were paramount to experience, emotion and the body and that consciousness are generated in the brain. It has been a popular school of thought ever since. René Descartes said, 'I think, therefore I am' (Descartes 1991). But if he took a high dose of psilocybin mushrooms, he'd experience a dissolution of his ego and a sense of merging with nature and the universe. Then he might have said, 'I am, therefore I think'.

In the eastern perspective, consciousness, mind and body are different and independent from one another. Consciousness is paramount and can be described as pure awareness of the present

moment. The brain is an instrument through which consciousness manifests itself. Thoughts and sensations are occurrences within that awareness. And our subjective-identity is nothing more than an idea of who we think we are based on thoughts and memories (Harris 2017).

I lean more toward the eastern perspective. But until there is more evidence, it's impossible to know for sure. The problem is consciousness is an experience. And although we know electrochemical events happen in our brains every instant, we don't experience it. But we do experience sights, sounds, sensations, thoughts and moods. Physically, we are billions and billions of cells and atoms. Experientially, we are consciousness and its ever-changing content. I think it's wrong to say we are entirely one or the other.

I feel like everyone needs to experience consciousness beyond their subjective self-identity. But it's important to become acquainted with our identities too, especially writers since our craft is an expression of the self. I spent twenty-nine years getting acquainted with mine, and it's been a long and wild ride. I'm not sure where to begin.

I was never good at any instruments and even worse at drawing. I played a lot of different sports but lacked the natural ability and didn't invest the time and energy to improve. I was a deep-thinker with an overactive imagination. And I liked to channel my thoughts and ideas to others. My parents said I was speaking in full sentences before my second birthday and asked a lot of questions about the world. The written expression came naturally to me and I developed an extensive vocabulary by the time I started primary school. My parents were proud. Their constant praise filled me with confidence. My literacy skills continued to grow but I never considered becoming a writer. It seemed unrealistic and unlikely. And it still feels that way sometimes.

William Ernest Henley famously wrote, 'I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul' (Henley 1888). The problem is masters and captains can be naïve. They can steer themselves into dire straits, especially when they're young and inexperienced. That's what happened

to me. Like most teenagers, my hopes and expectations were shaped by social conditioning. Not in a melodramatic way. But it imparted a very narrow definition of success. Get a degree, get a job, get married, raise a family and live happily ever after. I thought I had it all planned out. But life had something else in mind. And I had to walk down a harrowing road of uncertainty to find it.

I didn't think about my future much. Nothing mattered in a teenage wasteland. And when it came to an end, I had no idea what I wanted to do. Does anyone know at that age? I thought about it all the time and considered every possibility. From software engineering and information technology to psychology and archaeology. But I knew my strengths and narrowed it down to anything that involved reading, writing, and rhetoric.

Journalism was an obvious choice. But it seemed unreliable and it didn't interest me. I didn't like the thought of pursuing people and interviewing them. So, my first preference was law. It was a noble profession and seemed to pay well. I couldn't see myself becoming a barrister and representing people in court. But I could see myself as a solicitor, preparing cases and legal advice in a comfortable office. It didn't sound particularly enjoyable. But I didn't think anyone enjoyed their work. It was just something we all had to do. Not long after, I was accepted into a Bachelor of Laws at the University of South Australia.

Things started well enough. I embraced the university lifestyle, I made some friends, and my grades weren't too bad. But I wasn't enjoying it at all, and the further into the course the worse it became. I had no desire to become a lawyer. To spend most of my life rotting away in an office, stuck in the middle of the corporate grind, and doing something I had no connection with – it sounded like a nightmare. I didn't know what else to do. Uncertainty and anger plagued me throughout the course and it never went away. I stopped attending classes and putting effort into my work. But I was too stubborn and proud to quit. My friends and peers

were finishing their degrees and starting careers. I didn't want to fall behind.

Sadly, my life beyond studies took a dark turn too. My parents long and problematic marriage came to an end. My childhood dog passed away. And I became angry, anxious, depressed and confused. It was probably the lowest point in my life.

But when a person is at their lowest point, they are open to the greatest change. I set out on a personal journey to better understand self, life and the universe – and the connection between all three. I spent days and nights reading about science and philosophy. I watched countless lectures and documentaries. I listened to many audiobooks and podcasts. It was an endeavour and an escape.

I learned about the vastness of the universe and my small existence within it. I learned about the biological kinship we share with all life on the planet, the chemical kinship we share with the planet itself, and the atomic kinship we share with the universe. I learned, and learned, and learned. It was a humbling experience.

Everything is connected. Consciousness is a part of the universal equation too. Naturally, I became deeply interested in the science and philosophy behind it. I experimented with cannabis, which helped me develop insight, serenity and fellowship. And it made me think in more depth and detail. I experimented with meditation too, which was a hot topic in both science and philosophy. This phase allowed me to see beyond my circumstances and help me accept my life and the uncertainty ahead. My mind had been conditioned to think about and experience life in a narrow way. And I managed to decondition myself and see through the veil.

Graduation was bittersweet. I escaped the nefarious realm of law and earned a degree along the way. It meant more to me as a symbol of courage and resilience than an academic qualification. But I hadn't completely escaped the darkness yet. I still didn't know what I wanted to do. I hopped from one miserable job to the next, trying to make ends

meet. They were horrible experiences and made me feel more depressed and unsatisfied.

In a desperate attempt to make a change, I applied for a postgraduate degree in psychology and was accepted. Psychology has always interested me. I wanted to learn more about consciousness and meditation. The first semester was enjoyable. I learned about behaviour, sensation, perception, and learning and development. I also learned about social psychology, abnormal psychology and cognitive psychology. I enjoyed them all and it reflected in my grades. But the next semester focused on research design and analysis. And it started to wear thin. I couldn't see myself doing it for the rest of my life. I chose to discontinue my studies. I needed to do something I had a connection with. The problem was I still didn't know what it was.

That all changed when I had an incredible experience on psilocybin mushrooms. It was only a mild trip but it changed my life. I already knew I was a talking ape on the surface of a planet spinning 16,000 kilometres an hour, which orbits a star at 107,000 kilometres an hour. It's a matter of fact. But the mushrooms made me experience that knowledge directly. I looked at my hands, my feet, my house, my garden and the sky from that perspective. It was beautiful. It showed me that nothing made sense and nothing mattered. And it showed me that I had been taking my life and myself way too seriously. I was treating it like a problem to be solved rather than an experience to be had. And I became lost in the struggle. Thankfully, a compound inside an inconspicuous mushroom broke the mould.

A few weeks later, I took a leap of faith and applied for a postgraduate degree in writing. It was the only choice that made sense. Now here I am in my final year, reflecting on the journey it took to get here.

Aldous Huxley said, 'My fate cannot be mastered; it can only be collaborated with and thereby, to some extent, directed. Nor am I the captain of my soul; I am only its noisiest passenger.' I used to think I was

the master of my fate and the captain of my soul. And I thought that somehow I got lost along the way. But I was always supposed to become a writer. And I knew it too. I just had to convince myself that it was possible. And then I had to make it happen. It took a long time because I was a noisy passenger. But now that passenger is silent and quietly enjoying the ride.

Every writer has their own unique identity. It's an extension of who we are and what we have experienced. It manifests itself in everything we do. Michel Foucault believed a writer's identity is less about the person and more about the writing. An individual is expressing their ideas in writing. But at some point, the writing develops its own identity and is only linked to the author by association (Foucault, Bouchard & Simon 1997). Homer and Shakespeare are good examples. Historians know little about them. But we don't seem to care. They're known for their body of work, which has its own identity.

I think my writing has its own identity to an extent. But it's also a reflection of my soul, which is my conscious awareness of the present moment. Dan Zahavi describes it as an experiential core self (Zahavi 2008). It encompasses all the thoughts, ideas and memories I ever had. I think my identity as a writer can be defined as the intention and expression of my conscious awareness. Since my writing is an extension of it, it's a part of my identity too. From a non-dualistic perspective, the experience of life and the one who experiences it is the same. The same can be said about writing and the one who wrote it.

My writing starts with an intention, which is usually a theme, issue, topic or message. Then, I'll write something that captures and expresses that intention. I think that's the essence of all creative arts and it's true for writers as well as artists and musicians. Lately, I have intended to express my concerns about the state of the world and what could happen in the future. I have written bits and pieces of dystopian-fiction, science-fiction, historical fiction, and post-cyberpunk fantasy. They touched on different aspects of sociology, futurology, technology, environmentalism, and

political science, and contained a lot of social commentaries too. I have also written non-fiction articles about the cosmic perspective and why it's important, as well as a satirical online journal about human behaviour.

But I have written other content, like a young-adult fiction short story, a chapter of a memoir, and a screenplay too. I think when you understand that your identity as a writer is more about intention and expression than anything else, it transcends any specific genre. That's because the writing flows where intention goes. Stephen King is known for writing horror and supernatural fiction, but he's also written science-fiction, fantasy, and mystery novels. J.K Rowling is known for writing Harry Potter, the most successful young-adult fiction series of all time. But she tried something different and wrote *The Casual Vacancy*, a tragicomedy and mystery novel written for adults.

I think every writer has a style, which is the way we use words to express our intention. My style has changed throughout my life. I used to flaunt my knowledge and vocabulary and used more words than necessary in long sentences. It wasn't bad, but it was thorny and more about wordiness than anything else. One day, my classics and modern history teacher said, 'Keep it simple, stupid! Simple writing works better than complex writing.' I listened to his advice and used fewer words, but my writing became too formal, impersonal and somewhat mechanical – probably because it was academic. I continued to use that style in my law degree, and it was good on a technical level, but it had no soul.

Thankfully, in my quest to understand more about self, life and the universe, I read a lot of fiction too. I developed an appreciation for Ernest Hemingway, Mark Twain and Charles Bukowski. Their work was brilliant, and their writing style was simple, sincere and soulful. It was all about expressing a message in a simple, clear and convincing way and keeping the reader interested. Mark Twain said, 'Generally, the fewer the words that fully communicate or evoke the intended ideas and feelings, the more effective the communication.' Their writing didn't use unnecessary words to show off their vocabulary, but it wasn't simple to

the point of having no soul either. And from that point onward, my writing was about honest expression. I didn't care about portraying myself as a capable writer or trying too hard to keep it simple. I trusted myself to find a balance between the two.

Unfortunately, being a good writer isn't always enough to be successful. You need hard work, dedication, a bit of luck, and a plan. My plan is simple: I want to make a living writing about things I'm passionate about. Ideally, I would love to write stories, screenplays and non-fiction novels. My best friend is a filmmaker and we've always talked about making something together. That would be the dream. But in the start, I would be happy to write almost anything that pays well. Not because of the money, it's more about earning a livelihood from writing and sustaining myself as a writer. Freelance work is plentiful. But competition is fierce, and the income can be inconsistent. I haven't had anything published yet, let alone been paid to do so. It's not going to be an easy path and I never expected it to be. And I'm not exactly sure what will happen next. All I can do is put my heart and soul into writing and let it happen.

Creativity and The Creative Process: Let It Flow

It's one thing to know and understand your identity as a writer but understanding creativity and the creative process is important too. Creativity is a part of nature and human existence and it can be defined in many ways. A dictionary describes it as the use of imagination and original ideas to create something. It can be something intangible like an idea, theory, or musical composition, and it can be something physical like a book or a painting. Creativity is not unique to humans, and the Vogelkop bowerbird is a good example. Males build towers made of sticks and moss and decorate them with snail shells, acorns and stones to impress females. Of course, human creativity is more complex than that, and it can be found in many different fields and disciplines. It's everywhere and in everyone.

Creativity in writing is about expressing thoughts, feelings and emotion uniquely and originally. It's usually associated with fiction novels, short stories, poems and screenwriting but it plays an important role in other areas too. Non-fiction novels, news articles, and a professional letter are more impersonal and there isn't a lot of room for artistic depth. But there is still information and material being expressed, and it can be done in a creative, unique and original way.

Everyone is different, and no two writers are the same. There are originality and uniqueness in everything we create. It can be a narrative, complete with its own story, settings, characters, and themes, and it can be something simple like a choice of words and how we use them. If my identity as a writer is the intention and expression of my subjectivity, and the purpose of my writing is to express that intention, then creativity is how I express it. And the possibilities are endless.

Creativity happens on both a conscious and subconscious level and can be described as a process as well as an effect. It is rooted in the unconscious mind, and we can dive in and explore the depths of the

abyss (Blanchot, Maurice & Mandell 1995). And what we find is worked, moulded, interpreted, understood and expressed by the conscious mind (Hecq 2010). I know that to be true based on my experience.

My creativity happens in a flow state, which is dictated by my subconscious mind. I can't force myself to sit down and write. I'll often procrastinate and distract myself. But once I'm ready and in the zone, I become completely absorbed in the process of writing. My unconscious mind streams content from the depths of my soul, and my conscious mind processes and transcribes it. Hours can pass without even realising, and thousands of words found their way on my page. Anton Ehrenzweig describes this phenomenon as synchronizing the chaotic unconscious mind with the rationally determined thinking mind to reach a common goal (Orenstein 1995).

I think editing is an important part of the creative process too, and it's where the conscious mind shines. The unconscious mind is a stream of chaos, and it needs to be shaped and refined in an orderly fashion. I don't do first, second, third and final drafts, and I don't separate drafting and editing. I kind of write and edit simultaneously and repeat the process. Of course, in the start, my focus is to write as many words as I can. But I won't hesitate to shuffle them around and try different combinations. I'll add something and change it again, and again, and again until I'm satisfied with how it looks and reads. To an onlooker, it would probably look like a game of Tetris is happening on my screen, but it's a puzzle of words and sentences rather than geometric shapes and spaces to fit them in. I suppose that's what writing is too, except the shapes can be put together to represent language.

In a reflection on her own experience as a writer, Dominique Hecq said, 'Even as an author writes, the process of writing itself surprises her, unearthing tensions and vulnerabilities inherent in the event of creation she might not be entirely conscious of' (Hecq 2010). And when she reads her own words afterwards, she can't help but wonder where they came

from and how it happened. I feel the same way and will often learn more about myself and my unconscious mind after writing something.

But it's not all about writing and editing. The creative process needs a bit of planning and problem solving too. Some writers prepare and plan almost every detail, and others let the process happen and evolve. I'm not much of a planner and my writing tends to happen on its own. I think it's because writing is a dynamic process and too much thinking and planning dampens my creative flow. But having no plan and preparation at all can make the writing too unstructured and inconstant, and that can sometimes be an issue for me. So, I try and follow a plan to keep me grounded, but only a loose one because I'm all about that creative flow.

Generally, I follow my version of the snowflake method. First, I'll think about what I'm trying to express and how to express it. Then, I'll summarize it in a sentence or paragraph and branch out into other details like characters and setting or important points and topics to explore. And then I'll create an outline, which is more like a flexible road map than a chapter-by-chapter summary. It isn't much of a plan, but it gives me something to work with.

Research is an important part of the process too and there are many different methods and techniques we can use. A methodology is a discussion about why certain methods and techniques work and how they compare to others. I looked at four different ones in this course and two of them stood out to me; narratology and autoethnography. Funnily enough, I have been using them without even knowing.

Narratology focuses on narrative structure. It looks at what happens in a story and how it's told and evaluates the effectiveness of different elements like characters, chronology, point of view and voice (Beasley 2019). It helps us understand what works and what doesn't in different narratives and compares them. I always break down and analyse stories and look for things like plot holes, literary clichés, character consistency, and predictability. I think it's because I'm

conscious of them in my writing and make an effort to avoid them. So, I'm interested to see how other writers do it too.

Autoethnography is a method where writers focus on themselves, their own experiences and their perspectives on the world (Lincoln & Denzin 2005; Ellis & Bochner 2000). It blends autobiographical content with social, cultural and political observation (Devault 1996). I think every writer incorporates their thoughts, experiences and perspectives into their writing. It cannot be avoided, because writing is an extension who we are. But not everyone reflects on them and connects them to social, cultural and political observations. Maybe it happens subconsciously to an extent, but there's something to gain from doing it consciously too. I have written at least five articles and three short stories that embraced that connection.

The articles explained how learning more about the world, nature and the universe changed my life and explored some of the environmental, social and political issues happening in the modern world. The idea was that a more scientifically literate and open-minded population could help solve a lot of the issues in the modern world, and I used my growth and experience as an example.

Similarly, the short-stories were based on different social and cultural issues and touched on my personal experiences with them. Quest is about the social expectations imposed on students and how not everyone knows what they want to do at an early age. It was based on my own experience and I wanted to share what I learned. The Dome is a dystopian-fiction story set in a future where society has collapsed due to an economic collapse and an environmental crisis. Civilization was rebuilt in domed mega-cities owned and operated by the world's richest corporations. It was an expression of my thoughts and feelings about current social and environmental issues.

I have come a long way in knowing my identity as a writer and my creative process, but they will continue to develop and it's important to stay in tune. Keeping a written journal is a good way to do that. It helps us

make sense of ourselves, our experiences and the world around us, and it's the perfect way to express ourselves and find our voice (Boud 2001). I have tried to keep a journal many times throughout my life. It was enjoyable at the best of times and therapeutic at the worst of times, but it never lasted more than a week at a time.

Now I understand that it can be a useful tool. It will help me stay in tune with my identity as a writer and my creative process and allow me to reflect on my short-term and long-term progress and understand. And I can reflect on different experiences and how they helped shape my writing (Colbert 2010). Reflection is a key element, and it's more than describing observations and experiences, it's about breaking them down and understanding them too (Strampel & Oliver 2007).

Another good way to use a journal is to reflect on the ideas of others and how we interpret them, which is something I have done before. I started writing a historical-fiction novel last year and the story followed the life of two samurai warriors who had lost their way and tried to find it again. It was set in Japan's Edo period, a time where the country was becoming less feudal and more modern. I intended to explore what these changes were and how they affected the locals – particularly the samurai, who no longer had a purpose. But it affected different people in different ways and I didn't know how to narrow it down.

I wrote about my concerns in a makeshift journal and looked for other content set in the same timeline to find an answer. I stumbled upon an animated show called Samurai Champloo, which was written by a screenwriter named Shinji Obara. I enjoyed it so much, I analysed and reflected on it for about a week and wrote everything down in my makeshift journal. It had three main characters; two were samurai and one was a local shopkeeper, and they all had different experiences and struggles which overlapped throughout the story.

There were many different antagonists too, and most were samurai who abandoned their code to become mercenaries or henchmen – which

was common at the time. I realised that I shouldn't try and do too much with one or two characters. It would be unrealistic and taken away from the authenticity of their story. Instead, I should use side-characters and antagonists to show more ways the samurai were affected. It wasn't the most profound revelation, but it was the solution to my problem, and I wouldn't have found it without analysing another writer's work in written form.

This piece has been something between a reflective essay and a journal. I wanted to write it in a stream of consciousness style because it seemed most appropriate. I'm not entirely sure about the structure, but it seemed to work best. I reflected on consciousness and the nature of the self, as well as my own life and my decision to become a writer. Then, I looked at what an identity as a writer means to me, how it translates in my writing, and how my creative process happens. And throughout it all, I reflected on different theories and ideas discussed by others and how I interpreted them. I learned while writing this piece, and not only about myself, but what it means to be a writer too. I can see why it's a good idea to keep a journal in the years to come and I think now is a good time to start.

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