

# EDITOR'S COMMENTS

## Towards Scholarly Flourishing in the IS Field: Stories, Reflection, and Actions in an Emotional Time

By: **Andrew Burton-Jones, Editor-in-Chief**  
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Passion, joy, fear, heartbreak, anger—emotions play a huge role in our scholarly lives (Neumann 2006; Skakni and McAlpine 2017; Van Maanen 2010; Whiteman 2010).<sup>1</sup> The academic career is littered with emotionally significant events, such as our Ph.D. defense, our first academic job offer or rejection, our paper acceptances and rejections, and our tenure/promotion outcomes. Such emotional events shape and sometimes even break our scholarly identities, our well-being, and the lives of our loved ones (Gravett et al. 2020; Skakni and McAlpine 2017). Emotions also shape our ordinary, everyday lives because all scholarly activities, from articulating questions, to collecting and analyzing data, to collaborating, to writing papers, are—and should be—emotional (Neumann, 2006; Van Maanen, 2010; Whiteman, 2010). Far from being a distraction or a weakness, emotions drive, sustain, and give meaning to scholarship. This should not be a surprise, for “emotions are, for better or worse, the dominant driver of most meaningful decisions in life” (Lerner et al. 2015 p. 801).

Given the importance of emotions to scholarship and the importance of scholarship to this journal, you would think that we would talk about emotions regularly in our editorials. We are sure that everyone reading this editorial could think about an emotional time in their lives that greatly affected their scholarship—for good or for bad. However, it is well known that researchers rarely open up about emotions (Neumann 2006). Like many other professions, we avoid talking about emotion because the norms of our science (at least in the West) suggest that we should be driven by reason alone (Shine 2011; Voronov and Weber 2016). Humans are emotional, but we take pains to efface this side of our humanity in science (Rudd 1984). Ironically, not opening up to the emotions of scholarship does not make it less emotional. Instead, it *increases* the emotional labor and burnout we experience (Wharton 2009). It is not a healthy situation.

We could write about the emotions of scholarship at any time. Indeed, one of the triggers for writing this editorial is that there is so much about the topic that we need to open up about, some of which is very difficult (Levecque et al. 2017; Mazer 2021; Tham and Holland 2018; Urbina-Garcia 2020). However, we were also motivated to write this editorial now because of the emotional upheaval we have been going through caused by COVID-19. It has been such an emotional year! The global pandemic has killed 4 million people at the time of writing and has triggered subsequent crises in mental health, suicide, drug overdose, domestic violence, and child abuse and neglect (Holland et al. 2021). The problems have been even worse in lower- and middle-income countries (Kola et al. 2021). We will not know the full effects on our scholarship for some time, but we already know that the effects have been unequal, magnifying existing inequalities (Myers et al. 2020). Given this context, how could we *not* talk about emotions right now?

One of us attended a workshop last year in which a prominent speaker talked about how faculty were getting more work done during the lockdown than ever before. The acute desire to throw the computer through the office window at that point of the meeting can still be recalled! We are embarrassed to admit, but for certain stretches this past year, it has been difficult to feel passionate about research, especially our own. Excitement is hard to find in the general monotonous “blah” (Grant 2021), or worse, that many of us have been feeling for a while now. That elusive scholarly passion (Neumann 2006) is difficult to come by in the best of times, so what happens to it during the worst of times? And if you lose it, can you get it back? How? These are the questions we want to explore in this editorial. They are important for this journal and for the success of our field. After all, our journal and our field are products of emotion, for a scholarly life is not just a life of the mind, it is a life of the heart. Take the passion from the

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term emotion as our entry point into this discussion, as it is the commonsense label for describing how *we feel*, which is the focus of this editorial. The academic literature on emotions differentiates between affect, emotion, feeling, mood, etc. (Scherer 2005). What emotions are is, however, still subject to controversy (Barrett 2017a). In this editorial, we use the term emotion in its commonsense meaning to broadly denote affect, moods, general dispositions, and both mental and physical feelings.

scholarship and the scholar and what do you have left? While we join calls to resist the “publish or perish” culture in academia (Harley 2019; Tsui 2013), the real danger to scholarship is a loss of passion—it is “passion or perish.”

We have three aims with this editorial. Our first aim is to create space for talking about our emotions. If *MISQ* can do this, our field as a whole can do it. Given the traumatic, emotionally significant event we have been going through, we want to create space for emotional expression and be forthcoming with our feelings, including “ugly” ones. As academics, we are schooled to keep our feelings inside. Even during the pandemic, many of us only share stories of “making lemonade out of lemons”—last-minute heroic conversions to online teaching, successful publications and grants related to the pandemic response. Stories of overcoming adversity are inspirational, but they can create an impression that everyone is and should be coping. For those of us struggling, it reinforces the feeling of weakness and of not trying hard enough. We want to create space for other stories—stories of loss, fear, uncertainty, apathy, slipping up, giving up, letting go. By sharing such stories and encouraging a broader discussion, we hope to contribute to our field’s collective recovery process—a process through which we can find meaning and joy in our work and even flourish and thrive.

Our second aim is to underscore the need to be empathetic and sensitive to each others’ emotions and, whenever possible, to be uplifting. As an author-focused journal, this has always been a top priority for us (Burton-Jones 2021; Horn 2016) but it is particularly important now. Given the rawness of our emotions, we need to be sensitive to each others’ feelings when we engage in *MISQ* activities, when encouraging submissions, submitting papers, writing reviews, writing responses to reviews, writing acceptance/rejection letters, and so on. How we communicate to each other during this time can have a major effect on scholars’ lives (Skakni and McAlpine, 2017).

Our third aim is to outline some actions that we hope will help our field from an emotional perspective. In particular, given that COVID-19 has had an unequal effect on scholars in our field, we outline an initiative to help some of these groups. By supporting these scholars, we hope to help the scholarship of our field in general.

The rest of this editorial addresses each of these goals. We begin by opening up about the emotions of IS scholars, as seen through the emotional lives of six IS academics (including our own) during the last year. We then discuss recent research on emotions that can help readers make sense of what they are feeling and understand why and how emotions can play a role in scholarly work. We draw on the stories from our scholars and this research on emotion to explain the need for empathy and sensitivity in our *MISQ* activities. We then outline an initiative for a collective recovery process.

### **Stories from the Field**

It is often said that there is a story behind every paper in *MISQ*. Likewise, there is always a story behind that story and a story behind that one, because we all have complex lives. Researchers sometimes use metaphors to talk about scholarly lives, such as the metaphor of a marathon or quest (March 2011; Taylor and Martin 2002), but no metaphor can ever quite capture the richness and diversity of our lived experiences. We felt it could be helpful if we instead shared some firsthand accounts from scholars across our field. In a field as large as ours, it is challenging to choose representative stories. While there is no right way to do this, we share six stories from scholars from different regions, demographics, and positions to capture some of the variety of experiences and feelings in our field.

#### **Jessica Pye, Assistant Professor, Arizona State University: *Passion and Connection***

I didn't start out my journey knowing I wanted to be an academic. It was only when I was in graduate school and started working as a graduate research assistant on some real industry-level data that I found my passion for research. Looking back and reflecting on my journey to where I am today, I can say that it was this first project that inspired and motivated me to want to know more. Now, when I look for new topics or projects to work on, I want them to excite me. I want to *want* to work on them and not have it feel like work. I think passion for our research projects/papers/topics is something that has been lost lately. In watching doctoral students give presentations and job talks, you can tell the ones that are excited about their work and the ones that are not. We all go through rough patches, but if you pick a topic you are passionate about, it will better sustain you through those rough spots, especially like the one we have all gone through.

This past year has been unlike anything any of us ever imagined. Work-life balance has always been a challenge, and this past year has exacerbated it. I've come to realize that work-life balance is something that we all have to figure out as everyone's family/home life is different, but it's helpful to know that you are not alone. When the pandemic hit, suddenly my husband and son were home all the time, and I was thrust into juggling virtual school (my son's and mine) while trying to manage the everyday household chores and being tech support for the whole family. It was an enormous challenge, on top of the already demanding rigors of being in this profession. From my conversations with doctoral students and other junior faculty, many have felt the pressure of maintaining pre-COVID productivity while also trying to manage the increasing demands at home. For many doctoral students, they have said that staying an extra year was not an option and so the risk becomes burning out trying to do it all or feeling like you're neglecting your home responsibilities. This has unfortunately become more salient for our single-parent families and women in our field.

One of my biggest revelations during COVID is how much we rely on the social aspect of our field. Our major conferences such as ICIS, AMCIS, ECIS, PACIS, CIST, and HICSS provide much needed get-togethers especially for doctoral students and junior faculty. During our doctoral student networking events which were held over the past year, many students have said they felt very isolated as they were not going into the office or going to conferences to meet new potential colleagues and/or maintain friendships. For many students and junior faculty, conferences are a great way to share knowledge and find "your people." For me, conferences have enabled me to build my network of professional colleagues, share my experiences with other doctoral students, and show them that they are not alone. I also have a group of friends and we try to touch base every other month or so to see how we are doing. It's always hard to take the initiative as we are all tired and overscheduled with zoom meetings, but I always feel better after talking with them and motivated to keep moving forward.

Looking to the future, I hope we as a field can work more on inspiring the next generation of academics to research topics that they are passionate about and not just what is a fad or what is easily publishable. I also hope we can continue to share more of our experiences. Knowing that others, especially senior faculty, have struggled makes our journey seem less daunting. Many students and junior faculty underestimate the time, effort, and rejection associated with this field. It takes resiliency to keep working on papers year after year. Recognizing we all go through similar experiences and at some point, have all felt the same thing about reviewer #2 is incredibly comforting. Lastly, I look forward to the days when we can all get together again and chat about life, the universe, and research.

### Marlei Pozzebon, Professor, HEC Montreal & FGV EAESP (Brazil): *Sentirpensar*

Ailton Krenak—a Brazilian philosopher and indigenous movement leader—recently wrote about *the end of the world*, reminding us that we live in a time whose creations have resulted not only in social and environmental disasters, but in a sense of absence felt across various dimensions. Not the least of these is a perceived absence of meaning in the experience of life itself. In a similar vein, Dave Kopenawa—a Yanomami shaman—speaks of the *falling sky* (*a queda do céu*). This grows out of the indigenous vision that our current way of life threatens our survival on the planet—that we risk annihilation. This came home to me on March 15, 2020, when I ventured out on the streets of Montreal for the first time since the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic. I passed by masked people with fearful eyes, I saw closed almost all doors of the city. I felt a strange chill and had a sudden thought: "*this is a scene of Krenak's and Kopenawa's end of the world.*" Ten months later, I was flying back to Brazil, where the number of COVID-19 deaths had reached 3000 a day. There, I would witness the return of abandonment and hunger to stain the map of the country. Yet, at the same time, with the waves of contagion came waves of solidarity. Spreading across the regions of Brazil, this outpouring was marked by a distinct particularity: the greatest help was being offered by the least wealthy. Social movements dismissed by the elites, such as the "landless movement" (known as MST), were providing tons of food to the most deprived communities. Two of my beliefs were therefore reinforced: that Brazil is a land of paradoxes, and that a solidarity economy is a precious avenue to a fairer society.

Periods of serious disaster or crisis often lead people to a process of deep reflection about the meaning of their lives. I was no exception. The confinement gave me the opportunity to revisit my journey over 20 years as a scholar whose personal and work life spanned two contrasting realities—Quebec and Brazil. I realized that the North/South dichotomy was a key element in my search for meaning. Being trained as an IS and third-sector academic in the global North, my predominant inner struggle involved a persistent attempt to recover what I had lost in my dislocation from the "periphery" to the "center." This search has continued over the years: in parallel to trying to maintain the "productivity" necessary for peer legitimacy, I embarked on a feverish quest of revisiting Latin American thought. From my initial times as an undergraduate history major—where the pre-Columbian paradigm occupied a central place in my studies—until my subsequent encounter with decoloniality—an intellectual and political movement (*el giro decolonial*) that has grown in

Latin America since the 1990s—my activities, readings, and discussions with numerous people have given me the sense of finding my place, of giving meaning to the “experience of my life”. I helped to create a “talk wheel” (*roda de conversas*) called inspirations from the South where, without pretense, friends from South America share ideas, concepts, emotions and dreams about feeling-thinking. This notion of *sentirpensar*—associated primarily with Orlando Fals Borda, the Colombian sociologist and founder of participatory action research—is one of the tenets of the epistemologies from the South. It expresses the capacity to not separate body from heart, reason from love, logos from mythos. Nonetheless, the separation between intellect and emotion is a cornerstone of hegemonic Western thought, hence crucial for survival in the academic world. Today, I wonder how this outlook will stand up in the immediate future. Will the post-pandemic period reveal how this epistemic Euro-North American path has been as destructive as the one that led to the climate crisis and the potential collapse of the planet? Will people finally recognize that, indeed, both paths are in actuality one?

### Atta Addo, Lecturer, University of Surrey: *Isolation*

In the early days of my Ph.D., a well-meaning professor cautioned that no one enters academia to make friends. It was spoken in half jest and partly to test my resolve with the suggestion of a Faustian bargain between a life of the mind and isolation. But while some aspects of academic work might be intrinsically isolating, social isolation and its management during transformative events can be profoundly personal and less openly acknowledged.

When COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, I was six months into my first academic position in a UK university and had just moved to a small commuter town outside London. Being unattached and without kids, I started to make friends through work and socialized frequently outside work to build a local social circle. I knew from experience that such relationships would help me settle in and might even become a lifeline. But my efforts at repotting were torpedoed on March 23, 2020, when the UK imposed stay-at-home orders, banned nonessential travel, and closed public spaces.

As epidemiological jargon like “social distancing,” “self-isolation,” and “shielding” became everyday words, they also undermined trustful interpersonal interactions even when safeguards were in place. It became untenable to nurture meaningful social life without shared physical space and face-to-face interactions. Worse, having to reckon with social isolation and loneliness felt strange and disorienting although I had lived alone for the better part of two decades.

In Ghana where I grew up, native languages had no expressions for social isolation or loneliness. I had no memories of being without the company of teeming relatives and friends. I came to associate solitude with Westernness when I first came to Europe. I recall my intrigue at how taken for granted being alone was, without necessarily being melancholic, due to sociological conditions such as those chronicled by R. Putnam in his classic book, *Bowling Alone*. Even grimmer to me, social isolation and loneliness conjured up stories like the one I read in a London newspaper some years ago. A 38-year-old woman's skeletal remains were discovered on her couch, unnoticed by neighbors in her block of flats despite her TV blaring continuously for three years. While jarring and unusual, this story made real to me the perils of social isolation and loneliness. I later came to learn that social isolation and loneliness were considered chronic public health problems in many Western societies. Some experts even described it as a “crisis,” and an “epidemic.” All these descriptors pointed to its prevalence, long before COVID-19, as well as its association with mental health conditions, poor well-being, and premature death from nearly all causes.

And so, desperately hoping to escape the specter, I longed for a speedy return to normalcy and hoped that my social interactions would only have to endure a brief spell over WhatsApp and Zoom. This proved wishful as things worsened and lockdowns pushed people into deeper recoil. When the pandemic hit closer to home and people I knew died or lost loved ones, things felt more dire because I had no meaningful way of supporting those I deeply cared about or receiving support. Revising papers for resubmission started to require an extra step of pleading for deadline extensions. New papers remained electrical impulses in my brain. I was also unable to proceed with data collection that had lost funding to university belt-tightening. The lack of productivity was stressful, and trying to relax only heightened my stress and anxiety.

Meanwhile, in the changing higher education landscape, the threat of job cuts, furloughs, and increased managerialism under a cloak of “disaster management” piled on the pressure. Carrying out academic work sometimes seemed like the proverbial rearranging of deck chairs on the *Titanic*. I poured myself into teaching, like fellow U.K. academics who had been ordered to deemphasize research, in what the U.K.'s *Times Higher Education* called a “eulogy to research.” Nevertheless, the virtual classroom was not the lively place where students cracked wise, challenged forcefully, and spoke freely. It seemed more than just Zoom fatigue as even my most eager students shunned the camera and stayed silent. Alone in their dorm rooms, students were also dealing with their own anxieties, angst about loved ones back home, and the debilitating symptoms of COVID-19.

**Saji K. Mathew, Professor, Indian Institute of Technology Madras: *Being Human***

It's 11:00 AM on a Monday morning in May 2021. My body is on my office chair, but my mind wanders. What I read in a WhatsApp group is haunting me still. A professor who came to India from the U.S. died of COVID-19. Apparently, he had taken both doses of a COVID vaccine. Dreadful! Is science failing? Fear spikes my mind often and then ripples, leaving me in a sordid state. The cry of a colleague while searching for an oxygen concentrator, the exhaustion of a student searching for dialysis units for her father after he contracted COVID, the morbid whispers of a close friend who is diabetic, the frustration of colleagues with vaccine appointments, ... my mind hosts a tournament of horrid thoughts. Nerves go out of order. Let me try some breathing exercises, thanks to my family doctor's yoga lessons. Yes, I am back, for now.

I had planned to work on a couple of book chapters this month. Another ambitious target was to complete the design of a new graduate course on digital business strategy. But my work is stalled. The mental balance required for good academic work simply doesn't exist. In solitude, it's hard to release my mind from my overwhelming concerns about the COVID-19 situation. They call it the new normal. The psychological reward of teaching has shrunk. The joy of watching the spark on a student's face while learning something new is not equal to a thousand "likes" on a virtual platform. I miss the real faces. Faces communicate so much more than words. Language disguises meaning, faces don't!

Students miss the campus too. They want to come back, but they can't. Interactions facilitated their learning. A researcher who moved out of my campus decided to discontinue her Ph.D. program. She could not handle paper rejections while away. I felt helpless. Efforts to motivate her scholarship through our support systems proved futile. Her case reflects the present life of some research scholars. I sensed it was alienation from academic work while fighting anxiety and pain.

Let me think positively. Amidst the desert journey, thoughtful use of information technology let in some fresh air. AIS India Chapter organized a webinar series, "Rendezvous with IS Researchers," from June-September 2020. Our main aim was to engage positively with Indian IS scholars. The Indian IS community's academic passions found an expression through the rendezvous. The initiative delivered more than what we imagined—a rousing applause from 3,000 plus registrants, and 25% of them in every seminar! The Indian IS community got to meet together, first time. This wouldn't have happened unless it was virtual. Of course, we went virtual because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, 12 eminent IS scholars from the three geographical regions of the AIS agreed to talk, readily. It was a learning-full experience, elating our human values from a bit to a byte.

**Mari-Klara Stein, Associate Professor, Copenhagen Business School: *Becoming a Mom***

Before 2020 I was pretty sure how my academic career would go. I would focus my midcareer on publishing exciting and beautiful research (the kind that tickles your brain and delights your heart), experiment with writing in a more expressive and less formulaic way, publish in top journals or journals that I like (going for quality over frequency), aim for a few prestigious grants that wouldn't bury me in paperwork, do lots of mentoring in great editorial roles, and supervise doctoral students—all things I enjoy, and that would leave me time to also have a life full of travel and good food to enjoy with my partner. I would call it the "niche boutique" version of a career.

I imagined that one little human would also fit into this life. Being pregnant during the pandemic brought some additional worries, of course, but it allowed me to do all of my work from home during my final trimester, leaving me time for long daily walks and yoga. All in all, I think it was more relaxing than it would have been if I still had to go to the office.

Finally, in June 2020, our long-awaited daughter, Milla, was born—and all of a sudden there was a tiny human completely dependent on me and I felt more terrified and incompetent than I have ever felt in my entire life. It didn't help that while we were in the hospital, Milla got an infection from a standard blood draw. I still have nightmares about the neonatal intensive care unit with its incessantly beeping monitors. I don't think there's anything we could have done to avoid it, but it didn't stop me from feeling enormously guilty to the point where I would not allow myself to sleep properly for months in the fear that something will happen to her.

What does this have to do with my career and my research you may ask? For me, when my heart aches from guilt and my head burns from lack of sleep, there is no career and there is no research—I just didn't care. I was ready to quit without a look back. But I'm still here. It's not, however, because I have excellent coping techniques that I rigorously applied. Yes, I did some yoga and meditation, I talked to people ... but I also avoided my own thoughts, too scared to analyze what I was thinking and feeling, I behaved very poorly towards my partner, and I definitely did not take good care of myself. In

the end, the pandemic locked everyone in, and our home became my safe place where I had everything under control and where I could start to learn to relax again. All other places were scary.

Coming back from maternity leave did not give me an opportunity to try to break out of my cocoon—the school was closed, country in full lockdown. My first day back, I was met with a screen full of names and a sea of exhausted faces over video. I felt bad that I had gotten to “take a break,” while my poor colleagues had to work through the pandemic.

It's now June 2021. The school is still half closed, I'm a little less scared and trying to push myself a bit more. We get used to everything it seems—even a global pandemic and constant anxiety. I still want my “niche boutique” career. I'm just no longer sure how to go after it. I suspect for many of us the full consequences of the pandemic (and other events that happened during the pandemic) are yet to reveal themselves.

### **Andrew Burton-Jones, Professor, The University of Queensland: *Mixed Feelings***

As editor-in-chief, I spend a lot of time thinking about the trajectory of the field and our journal. I have to say that I feel inspired but uncertain. The inspiration is easy to talk about, and I regularly do. Our field is studying the phenomena of our time in business and society. You can see this by how often our topics are talked about in the media, by how many other fields now want to study our topics, and by the world's reliance on digital technology during the pandemic. We can feel justly proud of the ideas, theories, traditions, and results that our field has produced over 50 years and excited by the opportunities ahead. We can also feel proud of the new generation of scholars entering our field. Their hard work, creativity, and talent is resulting in waves of exciting papers coming into our journals. I am also inspired by how well our editorial board handles these papers. I learn from my board members every day. I am inspired by them as we work to advance the field and this journal together.

Yet, I am also uncertain. I rarely talk about my uncertainties, but they are often on my mind. My main uncertainty stems from the rapid growth of the scientific enterprise, not just in our own field but across others too. While growth can be positive, it brings several negative outcomes. One negative outcome is the rising intensity of competition in the publication “game” that creates many dysfunctional consequences for individuals, journals, and the field. Just like any human enterprise, too much stress can break individuals and collectives. The growth of the field also increases our tendency to reinvent the wheel in our research because we don't have good ways (yet) of rapidly learning what has been studied already and what is coming out. If in doubt, try keeping up with research on IT acceptance! A third outcome is the spread of managerialism and metrics across academia. While this trend isn't new, it is getting worse. Collectively, these three outcomes lead to a more general outcome—a sense that we're busier than ever but have less time than ever to do meaningful work. I certainly feel this with my own work.

Another set of uncertainties stems from changes we are seeing outside our field. Large corporates have always had a role in research, but the size and scale of the research now done by large tech vendors make me wonder how research will evolve from here. Will the benefits of scholarly independence outweigh the benefits of real-time analytics at scale coupled with the money to pay for great talent? It's hard to tell. We have also seen increasing skepticism about science across many societies in recent years that does not augur well for our future. And even when our societies support research, the institutional infrastructure to support university-industry research often fails to support our ideals. I've spent 18 months wrangling with contracts teams with my industry partner and university and I haven't seen any benefit from my efforts. I'm also seeing lots of paper submissions using industry data, but I often wonder if it is just from the companies that are happy for researchers to tell their stories—the “sanctioned” stories. What kind of science are we if we only tell the slices of the stories that are easiest to collect? My sense is that these problems will get even more challenging in an era of COVID-induced budget cuts and tough economic times.

As editor-in-chief, I am not sure if I am supposed to convey uncertainties like this. Part of me thinks that I should try to focus on the positives and find solutions for any negatives that I see. But some of the issues that are confronting us are systemic and difficult to solve. I also know that my situation in Australia is so much better than the situation faced by colleagues in many other parts of the world. But even in Australia, if I was talking with a young, bright student about whether to enter the IS scholarly field, or indeed any of the sciences, I would be unsure what to say. Scholarly life is a wonderful life, and an important life, but it is a really uncertain time.

## ***Making Sense of What We're Feeling: Emotional Awareness and Resilience***

Feelings of intense isolation, meaninglessness, pressure, fear, guilt, sadness, and uncertainty come through clearly in these raw and powerful stories. There are efforts to make “lemonade out of lemons”, but also confessions of helplessness. The yearning for passion, connection, meaning, and hope also come through clearly. Differences across countries are also evident, especially in the moving stories from the U.K., India, and Brazil. It is clear that all six scholars are affected in many ways by their feelings, just as it is clear that all of their feelings and experiences differ, due to personal situations and cultural differences (e.g., between East and West, and North and South). Overall, what can we learn from these stories from the field, and what more could we learn from the countless untold stories out there—those too painful to share or associated with still stigmatized topics (Loiacono and Ren 2018)? To make sense of what we are feeling, we turned to recent emotions research and two key concepts—emotional awareness and psychological resilience.<sup>2</sup>

Emotional awareness “encompasses how people understand, describe, and attend to their emotional experiences” (Mankus et al. 2016 p. 28). It includes multiple dimensions, including “clarity of emotions (i.e., the degree to which people unambiguously identify, label, and represent their own emotions), emotion differentiation (i.e., the complexity with which people represent the type of emotion they experience), and attention to emotion (i.e., the degree to which people attend to their emotions)” (Mankus et al. 2016 p. 28). Clarity of emotions may be further divided into type clarity and source clarity, where type clarity refers to the extent to which people are clear about the type of emotion experienced (e.g., sadness versus anger), while source clarity refers to the extent to which people are clear about the source of their emotional experiences. Emotion differentiation, also known as emotional granularity, refers to an individual’s ability to make fine-grained distinctions among emotional states (Barrett 2017a; Barrett 2017b; Erbas et al. 2019; Smidt and Suvak 2015). Attention to emotion may be further divided into voluntary and involuntary attention, capturing the distinction between purposeful and unintentional attending to one’s emotions (Mankus et al. 2016).

Why is emotional awareness important? Emotional awareness can contribute to adaptive emotion regulation and coping with adversity (Mankus et al. 2016; Tugade et al. 2004). Being able to differentiate between and better understand one’s own emotions, both positive and negative, can help improve emotional well-being (Erbas et al. 2019) and psychological resilience (Tugade et al. 2004), i.e., the ability to overcome and bounce back from adversity (Block and Kremen 1996; Block and Block 1980). By enabling emotion management, emotional awareness can be thought of as the first, critical stepping stone towards higher emotional intelligence (Mayer et al. 2008). A more complex understanding of one’s own emotions allows individuals to use this knowledge to “label” their emotions (Vine et al. 2020), adapt to negative circumstances, and broaden their “repertoire of behavioral and coping responses available to them, allowing them greater flexibility to utilize such responses effectively” (Tugade et al. 2004, p. 1183). In other words, “when a person has elaborate emotion knowledge, sensory inputs will be conceptualised in a targeted, situation specific way, and that person will have contextualised knowledge that is required to effectively deal with the situation at hand” (Erbas et al. 2019, p. 259).

Our stories reveal examples of such effective responses and psychological resilience. Marlei uses the lockdown to tackle the difficult reexamination of the meaning of her life and career rather than getting overwhelmed by the feelings of meaninglessness the situation brought out in many of us. Jessica makes an effort to socialize based on her examination of how important this social support is for her to fight feelings of isolation. Emotional awareness can also support interpersonal relationships by aiding “empathic accuracy, i.e., the ability to accurately judge the feelings of others” (Erbas et al. 2016). For example, Saji’s story reveals a complex understanding of a Ph.D. student and her decision to quit, rather than discounting her as not tough enough for the job. Atta’s story shows an empathetic consideration for his students’ well-being, despite his own struggles.

However, negative emotional awareness can also veer into dwelling and rumination (Vine et al. 2020). Both Saji’s and Mari’s stories reveal anxieties and worries storming the brain and the difficulty of letting them go. Applying one precise negative emotion label to an experience can aid emotion regulation by creating access to relevant contextualized knowledge required to deal with the situation, but applying more than one relevant label may be “counterproductive for downregulating negative states, given that the labels may also reify the perception and felt experience of the state being named” (Vine et al., 2020, p. 6). To put it simply, if we keep thinking or writing about how sad we are and use lots of different labels to make sense of what

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<sup>2</sup> Our aim is to give the readers the gist of these concepts, without going into too many details. We exclude many of the nuances of the science behind the concepts and focus only on conveying how and why these concepts are practically helpful. Please see the original sources referenced here for a fuller picture.

we're feeling (sad, depressed, miserable, downcast, desperate), we will not end up improving our ability to understand our sadness and regulate it. We will just get sadder and our resilience will decrease.

Positive emotional awareness, meanwhile, can be helpful, but it is difficult to learn and requires practice. According to the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson 2001), positive emotions can help broaden the repertoires of one's attention, thinking, and behaviors, producing patterns of thought that are unusual, flexible, creative, integrative, open to information, and efficient (Tugade et al. 2004). Interventions aimed at increasing positive emotional awareness, such as practicing gratitude (Rash et al. 2011), expressive writing (Welsch et al. 2020), and mindfulness exercises (Van der Gucht et al. 2019), can boost individual well-being, but require continuous effort because only the pursuit of genuine positivity contributes to well-being, while feigned, forced, or trivial positivity is likely to have the opposite effect (Fredrickson and Losada 2005). Mari's attempts at yoga, meditation, and expressive writing and Saji's breathing exercises are good examples. They help, but only temporarily.

Because emotional awareness is a skill requiring continual practice, it naturally varies by age (Mankus et al. 2016). Older adults have had more time to practice emotional awareness. They are better able to understand what they feel and why because they have had more diverse emotional learning experiences. Moreover, as people age, "they prioritize socially and emotionally meaningful goals and become more selective about the situations and people with whom they associate" (Mankus et al. 2016, p. 29). In short, they optimize their exposure to emotional experiences to meet their social and emotional goals and build psychological resilience. We see examples of this in Marlei's and Andrew's stories, as they make an effort to prioritize finding meaning and inspiration despite their worries and uncertainties. Younger adults tend to be less able to manage the emotional toll they experience (Mankus et al. 2016) and develop appropriate coping strategies (Pearman et al. 2021). This is a real risk for any scientific field because the pressures on young scholars (e.g., Ph.D. students and untenured faculty) are immense. They are the future leaders of our field but could too easily get burned out. The risks of burnout are especially high in the current pandemic. Despite having less health risk from COVID-19 than older adults, younger adults are more likely to be laid off (Schipper 2020) and more likely to bear greater emotional costs.

It is also helpful to understand how gender relates to emotional awareness. The effects are complex because much depends on how men and women are socialized to experience and express emotions differently in different cultures. In the West, for instance, women tend to attend to their emotions more than men, both voluntarily and involuntarily, but there is no difference when it comes to understanding one's own emotions and their source (Mankus et al. 2016). This may leave many women to struggle. In particular, many women are expected to be "good with" emotions, both their own and others (e.g., due to their socialized caregiving roles, Van Osch and Beath, in press), but there is no evidence to support their greater ability. As a result, women often have to spend more effort and time than men attending to emotions. This extra effort then increases their stress and mental load, on top of the already high expectations to manage the stress and emotions of their family members and dependents (DeGroot and Vik 2020; Mankus et al. 2016).

### ***Emotional Awareness, Resilience, Mental Health, and Scholarly Flourishing***

In sum, emotional awareness can have both benefits and costs. In terms of benefits, negative emotional awareness can help individuals improve their coping strategies, increase their emotional sensitivity towards others, and increase their psychological resilience. Positive emotional awareness can be even more valuable by helping individuals move from survival mode (focusing on resilience alone) to finding joy and passion—what we call scholarly flourishing. Flourishing refers to optimal human functioning, "characterized by four components: a) *goodness*, indexed by happiness, satisfaction, and superior functioning; b) *generativity*, indexed by broadened thought-action repertoires and behavioral flexibility; c) *growth*, indexed by gains in enduring personal and social resources; and d) *resilience*, indexed by survival and growth in the aftermath of adversity" (Fredrickson and Losada 2005, p. 686). Flourishing lies at one end of the mental health continuum, with depression at the other end and languishing (feeling hollow or empty) in the middle.

A key predictor of flourishing is the ratio (around 3:1) of positive to negative affect (including emotions, moods, attitudes, sentiments) (Fredrickson and Losada 2005). During the pandemic, for many of us this ratio has shifted drastically towards negative affect and pushed us into languishing (Grant 2021), a narrowly focused survival mode, where many of us just "exist," functional enough to do the bare minimum to get by but far from the optimal functioning required for passionate scholarship (Neumann 2006) where we can generate new ideas and grow. In the next section, we propose a new initiative at *MISQ* aimed at supporting such scholarly flourishing.

In terms of costs, dwelling on negative emotions and analyzing them in ever-greater granularity is likely to make us feel worse rather than better. As the ratio of positive to negative affect shifts towards the negative, we can lose our passions and hope, start to languish, or worse (Frederickson and Losada 2005). Unfortunately, the risks of this occurring are high for many scholars because they are already under so much pressure. It is well-known that the emotional challenges of scholarly life have been growing (Edwards et al. 2021). While COVID-19 exacerbated the problems (especially for some), many academics were already at a breaking point (Levecque et al. 2017; Tham and Holland 2018; Urbina-Garcia 2020). The ever-increasing competition, the publish-or-perish culture, the focus on rankings and A-journals, and the managerialism of universities, has left many scholars feeling jaded (Mazer 2021), cynical (Clair 2015), and depressed (Edwards et al. 2021). Academia can be brutal and unforgiving. The pressure can be all-consuming. Scholars need to find ways to ignore the rat-race and look after themselves (Lee 2004). While we can all benefit from that, we also need to go beyond individual responsibility. At *MISQ*, we wanted to ask ourselves what *we* can do to be a force for good. The next section describes some initial steps.

### **Implications for *MISQ***

We now take a more prescriptive turn to explore how we might, on the one hand, counter the negative mental health effects described above, and on the other hand, support scholarly flourishing. We suggest a dual approach: one focused on existing activities at *MISQ*, another focused on new activities.

### **Implications for Existing *MISQ* Activities**

While we pride ourselves at *MISQ* on our culture of virtuous reviewing (Rai 2016), we need to be even more sensitive to each others' emotions at this time. When an author is close to burnout, it can take just one uncaring or negligent review to break the author's self-esteem and motivation. Hurting the author hurts scholarship through the papers that authors give up on, fail to write or submit, or the corners they cut because they no longer care (Clair 2015). Editors and reviewers suffer too. Reviewers and editors bear significant loads and often stretch themselves and their families beyond their capacities. We need to be empathetic to their feelings too.

We call for the cultivation of more empathy, sensitivity, and emotional awareness in *MISQ* activities, when we submit papers, review papers, write AE and SE reports, and interact in the review process. Of course, good reviewers and editors already practice empathy. As Allen Lee wrote years ago: "Some reviews tend to be dry. As an author and editor, I find that any hint or explicit statement about the reviewer's feelings will help me to interpret what he or she means" (Lee 1995 p. 91). We just need to take this idea further and think about it more deeply. Rather than emotional sensitivity being a nice addition to a review, it needs to be at the forefront of our minds.

If broaden-and-build theory is correct about the role of positive emotions, such a mindset is likely to lead to higher quality reviews, reports, and responses, and thus higher quality scholarship being produced, due to the benefits for creativity, flexibility, and integrated thinking that such an emotional state affords. For instance, one of us (Andrew) has strong memories of the positive emotions evoked by particular papers he has handled as an editor, including feelings of awe (for Nan 2011), intrigue (for Larsen and Bong 2016), and delight (for Kane et al. 2021). He thinks and hopes that by recognizing these feelings and understanding why these papers evoked these feelings, he was able to serve as a better editor for each one during the review process (e.g., by maintaining and strengthening those aspects of the papers that evoked those feelings during each revision).

In addition to helping us understand what we like about a paper, emotional sensitivity can also help us understand what we find problematic about a paper or a program of research, whether we are an author, reviewer, or editor. This is because what appears to be problematic can depend on our feelings about the literature, our hopes and desires, our taste and sense of style, and our dislikes and pet hates. After all, it is easy to dislike (even fear) a paper if it challenges ideas that we believe in. Having a higher level of negative emotional awareness allows us to understand our negative emotions better, why we have them, and how we should respond. For example, as reviewers, understanding what it is that we do not like about a paper or a response by the authors is key. Does it make us angry, fearful, frustrated, or disappointed? Why? Understanding this will make it less likely that we make incorrect judgments or respond needlessly aggressively. Appropriately expressing our emotion in a review may actually empower the author to be patient, communicate clearly, and not assume ill intent where there is none. The same applies for authors trying to better understand what they do not like about a reviewer's or editor's comment and find an appropriate response.

Attending to emotions is everyone's task. Being hurtful is not a matter of style or personality, it is a lack of basic skills (or a response to overwhelming stress). As our review of the literature above shows, there is no evidence of gender differences in terms of the skill of emotional awareness. Male editors or reviewers are no less capable than women at cultivating the necessary degree of emotional sensitivity. We should not place undue expectations on female scholars, reviewers, and editors. We should expect emotional awareness and sensitivity from everyone.

More experienced scholars, however, do have the capability and, thus, responsibility to lead by example. In their roles as editors, such scholars can leverage their emotional experience to create a respectful and uplifting review process and stop a review process from becoming dysfunctional. This can sometimes be done quite simply, e.g., by making a few well-chosen comments in a decision letter. Other times it takes more work, e.g., meeting an author one-on-one to help figure out the next steps. Either way, it can prove vital. In their roles as authors, experienced scholars can help their junior co-authors craft well-articulated response letters, especially in response to terse reviews. Experienced authors can also help their co-authors by offering support and solace, especially in case of rejection. Younger scholars will learn from their example. Senior scholars: please take note.

### **Implications for New Activities: The *MISQ* Scholarly Development Academy**

The *MISQ* Scholarly Development Academy initiative follows in the footsteps of other *MISQ* initiatives that demonstrate our role as a platform for engagement in our field (Rai 2017). As a platform for engagement, we have long moved beyond just processing manuscripts. We run workshops for authors and reviewers, give seminars around the world, engage in social media, publish research curations, and so on. The common thread through all of our activities is supporting scholars and scholarship. The motivation for the new initiative proposed here is that we need to do our part to help scholars who are systematically disadvantaged from producing the finest scholarship because they are suffering disproportionately in the emotional toll of an academic life.

Our goal is to identify segments of our scholarly field who are disadvantaged (both in general and also due to COVID-19) and offer a program to help them. Over time, we hope to address many deserving segments of the field, e.g., those who suffer from gender biases, racial or ethnic biases, physical disability biases, and so forth. In the first instance, as a test case, we will focus on female scholars. Gender bias is a well-known scourge in society (Reskin 2000) and in science (Huang et al. 2020; Winslow and Davis 2016). Even when revealed, gender biases are often ignored, discounted, or unsupported (Cislak et al. 2018; Garcia-Gonzalez et al. 2019; Handley et al. 2015). We know that COVID-19 has exacerbated negative outcomes for women in society (Dang and Nguyen 2021) and in science (Deryugina et al. 2021; Myers et al. 2020; Pinho-Gomes et al. 2020). We also know that there are gender biases in the IS field and we have seen calls to address them (Beath et al. 2021; Gupta et al. 2019; Windeler et al. 2020). In short, the evidence shows that we must do something.

While we plan to focus this first instance of the initiative on female academics, we will also take an intersectional approach, that is, to recognize that gender inequality coexists with other inequalities, such as economic and social inequality. In short, while gender is our focus, we will account for other factors too (Britton and Logan 2008; Payton et al. 2021; Ryan and El Ayadi 2020). For each segment of the community we support, we will coordinate our activities with other relevant activities in the field. For instance, in the case of female IS academics, we will coordinate this initiative with the AIS Women's Network (Loiacono et al. 2016) and other efforts to advance women in IT, such as the ImPACT IT project (Loiacono et al. 2020). We are also leveraging our experience with related, successful initiatives. In particular, the IS field is very familiar with mentoring young academics through consortia (Gable et al. 2016). *MISQ* is also very familiar with running author-development workshops (Rai 2017). The initiative we have planned can be viewed as a combination of a junior faculty consortium and an author development workshop.

The *MISQ* Scholarly Development Academy will be an annual consortium with two foci: *paper development*, to help us overcome biases in publishing (Lundine et al. 2018), and *career development*, to help address biases in access to mentors and career support (Mummery et al. 2021). The two foci are, thus, aimed at supporting generativity (i.e., broadened thought-action repertoires and creativity in scholarship) and growth (gains in enduring personal and social resources in one's academic career) (Frederickson and Losada 2005) needed for scholarly flourishing. Taking a strength-based approach, mentors in the academy will help participants to learn how to build on the strengths of their existing work to enhance its publishability, and build on their personal strengths as a scholar to enhance their research career. Overall, the goal is to support the flourishing of the next

generation of IS scholars, help release some of their burden, and renew their passion for scholarship. Given the *scholarly* focus of *MISQ*, compared to the broader focus of other institutions (e.g., the Association for Information Systems, which also supports the teaching components of an academic career), this initiative will focus on scholarship and the (re)kindling of joy in scholarship.

Admittance to the first cohort of the *MISQ* Scholarly Development Academy will be limited to post-Ph.D., untenured female IS academics. Despite our focus on scholarship, we do not limit admittance to tenure-track academics, because there is gender-inequity in the decision to take non-tenure-track positions (Cheng 2020).<sup>3</sup> Whether a female scholar is on a tenure track or a nontenure track, admittance to the *MISQ* Scholarly Development Academy will be based on an application and selection process that requires evidence of past or planned scholarly work. The specific selection process will be outlined in the coming months on the *MISQ* website and communicated via the AIS World Listserv among other venues. We will take as inclusive an approach to selection as possible, but if resources are constrained, preference will be given to scholars who are likely to suffer multiple types of inequity due to their personal or geographical circumstances.

Much like other junior faculty consortia, applicants will be admitted to one and only one cohort of the *MISQ* Scholarly Development Academy (e.g., the 2022 cohort, the 2023 cohort, etc.). Events may later be held for cohorts from a given year, as occur for ICIS Doctoral Consortium reunions. At this stage, we expect that the Scholarly Development Academy events will be held online, for ease of access and inclusivity, but in-person events will be considered in the future. Mentors for the *MISQ* Scholarly Development Academy will be chosen from a diverse set of IS scholars, especially those with experience in editorial roles at *MISQ* whether now or in the past.

We are excited to offer this initiative. We hope it helps the field and we will let the field know through these editorial pages in the future whether we have been successful and what we learned.

## Conclusion

Writing this editorial has been an emotional experience for us. We were unsure whether to write some of our thoughts, yet we felt strongly about the need to do so. We have been moved by our colleagues' stories and by their willingness to share their thoughts with us. We know the field is full of other powerful stories. Our heart goes out to those scholars who are burned out by the chaos and sadness around them in these very difficult times. We hope you can hang in there. We hope this editorial can help trigger more discussion about these issues in the field. In our own careers, we have been fortunate to have mentors and colleagues who have helped us emotionally during dark times. We hope we can pay forward some of the support we have received to others.

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<sup>3</sup> We recognize that different countries and regions may not use the term "tenure." By "tenure," we simply mean a continuing and secure contract rather than a fixed-term employment contract. While all scholars deserve support, those without a continuing contract are especially vulnerable.

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