

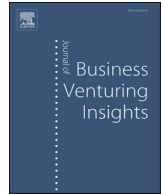


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The unsuccessful self-treatment of a case of “Writer’s block”: A replication through the lens of a budding entrepreneurship scholar concerned with originality, contribution, and rigor

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Abstract

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Appendix

The appendix is provided to explain the story behind how this soon to be foundational article in the field of entrepreneurship came to be published. It includes the author's originally submitted cover letter describing the intended humor and underlying message of the work, reviews by the referees who provided feedback in the good-natured spirit in which the manuscript was meant to provoke, and satirical responses by the author. Together, these materials show a promising openness by well-established members of our academic community to lightheartedly mock the limitations of the publishing process while also sketching an outline of hope for future generations of entrepreneurship scholars to be able to balance the seriousness of their work with equal measures of humor, risk-taking, and constructive support for the creative pursuits of their peers.

Author Cover Letter

Dear Professor Muñoz,

I am submitting the manuscript entitled "The Unsuccessful Self-Treatment of a Case of Writer's Block: A Replication Through the Lens of a Budding Entrepreneurship Scholar" to be considered for publication at *Journal of Business Venturing Insights*. No data used or theory developed in this project have been published or are currently under review at another journal. In fact, the submitted article contains neither.

This manuscript has been a labor of passion for me. Just as the concept of the renowned American sitcom *Seinfeld* was pitched as "a show about nothing" yet delved into the intricacies of everyday life, this article, entirely devoid of content, aims to provoke contemplation on how entrepreneurship scholars navigate creative barriers like writer's block and identify meaningful research avenues.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of [Upper, 1974](#) groundbreaking publication entitled "The Unsuccessful Self-treatment of a Case of 'Writer's Block'" in *Journal of Behavioral Analysis*, there is no better time for considering whether his findings can be replicated within the entrepreneurship context. Notably, the work of [Upper \(1974\)](#) has been replicated by numerous studies in other fields (e.g., [Artino, 2016](#); [Ampatzidis, 2021](#); [Didden et al., 2007](#); [Hermann, 2016](#); [Molloy, 1983](#); [Skinner and Perline, 2016](#)). In fact, [McLean and Thomas \(2014\)](#), undoubtedly while avoiding real work, published a meta-analysis summarizing the findings of these prior studies. Naturally, Upper's article has garnered much notoriety. The publication has accumulated approximately 150 citations in Google Scholar. In addition, a Wikipedia page has been dedicated to this magnum opus and other works that have attempted to replicate its findings ([The Unsuccessful Self-Treatment of a Case of "Writer's Block" - Wikipedia](#)).

Now to the main point. Why might writer's block be particularly relevant to entrepreneurship scholars? Is it because of complexities relating to the multidisciplinary nature of entrepreneurship research, pressure to produce more distinctive and innovative scholarship than what is found in related disciplines such as organizational behavior or strategic management, or desire to generate knowledge that will have particularly impactful implications for business and society? Perhaps all of these things. But maybe it also has to do with the hidden constraints that our field has placed upon itself.

Imagine a budding entrepreneurship scholar embarking on the journey of conducting captivating research. What metrics of success should she prioritize? High citation counts and publications in prestigious journals often dominate discussions on academic success—largely determining tenure, promotion, and annual merit-based salary increases. With these points in mind, where should she begin in the development of her research agenda? Highly cited articles, on average, tend to be focused on commonly studied topics and grounded in well-established theories. It is an unfortunate reality that the likelihood of one's work being cited diminishes when there are few researchers delving into similar topics. Additionally, the aims and scope of top-tier journals commonly suggest a preference for publishing original and interesting research. But our astute young scholar is not so easily fooled. Through extensive reading and keen observation, she has discerned that it is the meticulous and gradual progression of established research streams that predominantly earns publication in these esteemed journals. More precisely, she has identified a trend in which extensively explored subjects such as crowdfunding, entrepreneurial intentions, and entrepreneurial orientations currently carry the day in terms of both publication and citation counts at leading entrepreneurship journals. This is the material that she has to draw from to develop her inspiration, reminiscent of the "garbage in, garbage out" model of creativity that she once read about in a doctoral seminar.

If this is the path that she must pursue to enhance her odds of success, then what new remains to be explored in these areas of research? She thinks, "I have never seen a crowdfunding study about entrepreneurs holding kittens while making their pitches. This gap in the literature surely must present an opportunity!" Even I must agree that kittens are cute as hell and likely to evoke positive vibes among prospective crowdfunding backers. Is such research interesting? Absolutely! I want to know how much of an impact on crowdfunding success that holding some cute kitties can actually have, and I'm not even a fan of cats! But if her hypothesis is supported, does this make the research and its findings meaningful? Will it lead to a wave of crowdfunding campaigns featuring kittens? If so, will this saturation of kittens in crowdfunding pitches extinguish the previously identified positive effect via habituation? And, if not, should she move even further in this research direction? How about curvilinear effects regarding the duration or number of kittens featured? What about the intersectionality of kittens with the attractiveness, gender, age, and ethnicity of the entrepreneur? Will the inclusion of puppies have a similar effect? If so, how about puppies along with kittens? The possibilities of what has never been studied are limitless.

Next, let's suppose that our young scholar indeed finds initial success down this path. The inertia of her early achievements will undoubtedly make her a victim of path dependency—becoming uniquely skilled at working with the theories, data collection methods, and statistical techniques needed to publish this particular type of research. She will continually be asked to serve as a reviewer for similar research and be invited to join other research teams with likeminded interest in studying the

“kitten effect.” Before she knows it, she finds herself as a senior scholar approaching retirement, known as the “cat lady” of the field, and wondering whether there was any value or meaning in generating the body of her career’s work.

Replace the word “kitten” or “cat” with other terms and this is where most scholars in our field (and in related ones) eventually find themselves. As a newer business discipline, our field has been obsessed with attaining legitimacy and status. By conforming to the rules and norms of other related disciplines, in an attempt to speed this process, we have in many ways rigidly rushed the paradigm formation process for our field. Consequently, entrepreneurship research has largely become derivative to other business disciplines, which similarly lack incentives for creativity and struggle to publish substantive scholarly work.

I am a huge believer in the importance of humor. It is something that I have recently begun to build into my own research stream (e.g., [Hmieleski and Cole, 2022](#)), and is potentially one key to stepping away from incrementalism. Most interesting ideas begin as wild notions. Without moments of levity, such opportunities are less likely to materialize or find room to blossom. Yet our work is subject to a review process that is dominated by negativity and rejection. It often chokes off the opportunity for creative development by focusing on what is missing rather than following the lead of skilled comedic improvisers to instead play “Yes, and ...” by constructively building on what is present.

It is my hope that publication of the current work places a stake in the ground demonstrating that entrepreneurship researchers are less afraid to express humor and playfulness than are those in other areas of business that have to date (prudishly) failed to extend the work of [Upper, 1974](#) by engaging in such humor within their scholarly publication outlets. But more importantly, I hope this article (despite its lack of theory, data, or even words) serves as an example for the productive use of humor within our field—inspiring entrepreneurship researchers, young and old, to engage in levity and encourage the development of wild ideas that are needed for producing distinctive and meaningful scholarship.

Thank you in advance for considering this manuscript for publication. I look forward to hearing your reactions and those of the reviewers; even though the contribution, exacting rigor, and importance of the work are self-evident.

Very sincerely,
Keith Hmieleski.

Reviewer Comments

Reviewer 1 Comments

I have studied this manuscript very carefully and have not detected any flaws in the arguments or replication protocol. It is a most concise manuscript, with sufficient detail to allow its replication by other investigators.

On a different note: "through the lens of a budding entrepreneurship scholar" is unclear as subtitle. You might consider the following subtitle: "A replication in entrepreneurship by a budding scholar concerned with originality, theoretical contribution, and rigor". It captures better the spirit of the cover letter.

Reviewer 2 Comments

Thank you for the opportunity to read your research. Even though there is much to like about this paper - i.e., the infinite potential of the white page, I am afraid the contribution to scholarship is not yet enough to justify publication. I recommend that the author base his research on an exemplar paper - i.e., a template used to guide the structuring of this paper (see [Huff, 1999](#)) - to better meet reader expectations (see [Shepherd and Wiklund, 2020](#)).

This would involve an abstract, keywords, an introduction with three paragraphs following the exact syntax offered by [Barney \(2018\)](#) - i.e., the second paragraph must start with 'however' - or the five 'c's - common ground, complication, concern, course of action, contribution (see [Lange and Pfarrar, 2017](#)). You might also consider [Locke and Golden-Biddle, 1997](#) advice on how to construct intertextual coherence and then diplomatically problematize it to create the perceived need for your research.

If you choose to go the qualitative route with the research, be prepared to completely reframe your paper in the second round. Despite your familiarity with the data, I will imagine the forgone path was the better option based on a single quote I read in your paper. That is, if you frame the paper theoretically, I will prefer a framing around the phenomenon instead, but should you choose to frame it around the phenomenon, I will suddenly believe that it should have been framed around the theory. Either way, I will insist that you "show don't tell" me about your data, no matter how much you might have already done that.

The next section of your paper should consist of a review of "the literature". Be prepared for me to pay no mind to the logic of your arguments. If your work does not cite my research or the two articles I have read on this topic that are in press in 2024, then I will assume that you have no idea what you are doing. Indeed, your citation of [Upper \(1974\)](#) - no matter how relevant and insightful - already suggests to me that your ideas are old and that you have not been informed that ChatGPT4 has already solved this problem. In fact, it is writing this review right now and just finished serving me breakfast.

Additionally, no matter how exhaustive your review of the literature may be, please be ready for me to point out that you missed "entire literatures" that are relevant to the subject at hand. These "entire literatures" will ostensibly refer to an adjacent literature that is at best tangentially related, but in reality these "entire literatures" will refer to one obscure best paper proceedings I published for a conference I attended a decade ago. I realize that I never actually subsequently published that paper, but nevertheless, that proceedings paper clearly inspired your work and has much to say about your topic even if only John Nash (circa the film *A Beautiful Mind*) can see the connections.

Again, if you choose to go the qualitative route, please be aware that I will likely hold your willingness to answer my call for an exhaustive review of the literature against your choice of method. Indeed, I will use it to undermine the premise that qualitative research is necessary, and instruct you that a quantitative, theory testing study may be more appropriate given how much we now seem to know about this topic.

Now that you have reworked the front half of your paper to resemble every other paper ever written, I may now believe that you know what you are doing enough to read the rest of the paper without merely looking for more reasons to reject it - a decision I made on page one.

Finally, even though your research already seems to have cured my own writer's block, thereby making a practical contribution, I have chosen to ignore this benefit and have instead advised the editor to reject your research because I cannot see a path forward for this research. Mind you, my review was late, and it will be completely coincidental that you will see [Upper \(1974\)](#) now referenced in the discussion section of my forthcoming paper which is now finalizing for a competing journal and which now calls for research on humor and writer's block.

I am sorry I cannot be more positive in this review, but I am a narcissistic misanthrope unable to take another's perspective enough to understand their creative intentions and help them facilitate their objective without somehow making the project about my work, my interests, and myself. I strongly recommend you consider repressing your creative tendencies and learn to mindlessly comply with the norms of our field by studying only topics chosen by those who have gone before and presented according to their preferences. Only then will you understand the power and beauty of a soul crushing "rigor" that pays no mind to relevance. Once you do, you will find the kind of release that has made me the ebullient, encouraging, joy-filled, Reviewer 2, you have encountered today. I wish you all the best with this important research program moving forward, provided you might find a way to make it less important and less interesting. Good luck with the impending transformation.

General Responses to Reviewer Comments

Response to Reviewer 1

The discerning and succinct feedback you have provided is truly appreciated. The concise nature of your brilliance stands out in academia's sea of verbosity, all without a hint of the usual self-important bluster. Your recognition of the manuscript's clarity and replicability reaffirms that I have achieved the precise goals that I set out to accomplish with this study. Following your insightful guidance, I have extended the title as suggested. I am truly grateful for your time and expertise in evaluating my manuscript. Your encouraging words inspire me to continue striving for excellence, perhaps even articulately describing theory, data, and findings in future works.

Response to Reviewer 2

Thank you for your thoroughly enlightening review, which has left me feeling as though I have just navigated a scholarly obstacle course designed by an overzealous academic version of the Cheshire Cat. Your feedback is indeed an impressive labyrinth of wit and wisdom. Bravo on crafting a review that is twenty-five times the length of my originally submitted article. This thoughtful, monumental, and self-aggrandizing feat is surely worthy of inclusion as a Guinness World Record, alongside the longest lecture in recorded history.

In the grand tradition of reviewer suggestions intending to metamorphose a paper from apples to oranges, you seem to have gone a step further—instead intimating that your appetite for a complete overhaul of the manuscript will only be quelled by a transition in focus to the pungent delight of durian fruit. However, I prefer to keep the paper aligned with something that is more palatable for the masses.

Your astute observation regarding the "infinite potential of the white page" perfectly captures the existential angst of every researcher staring down the blank canvas of academia. I can't help but agree; the allure of the unmarked page is both tantalizing and terrifying.

As requested, I have included references for 65 of your unpublished works. I hope you will not mind that, in order to maintain the customary ratio of length to contribution for the manuscript, these references have been reduced to a font size of 0.00000069420 and will only be readable through use of a special telescope designed by SpaceX. Rest assured of my willingness to add more if I have missed any.

I appreciate your implicit optimism in positing the existence of an objective world comprised of independent actors that can be quantified and measured. From a solipsistic view (which, ironically, seems to resonate with your general nature), it's important to clarify that neither a qualitative nor a quantitative approach is employed or suitable for this article. The focus here isn't on adhering to either method but rather on presenting an alternative perspective that transcends traditional research paradigms and conforms solely to my reality. As I consider the mysteries of existence—whether objective or subjective—I'm left pondering if even you, anonymous Reviewer 2, exist beyond the confines of my own mind!

Your suggestion to align my paper with exemplar templates from the annals of scholarly lore sends shivers of excitement down my spine. Who wouldn't want to emulate the syntactic elegance of [Barney \(2018\)](#) or dance to the rhythm of the five 'c's as prescribed by [Lange and Pfarrer \(2017\)](#)? It feels like I'm being invited to a grand ball where the steps are predetermined, and deviation is tantamount to heresy. Let me illustrate with a few examples how my work integrates the wisdom and spirit of some of the influential sources you have noted.

Barney (2018)

How could any scholar not love an academic commentary detailing how one must navigate the intricate structure of first sentences, second paragraphs, and the sacred "however"? It's as though we are expected to draft our papers with the precision of a Swiss watchmaker, lest our theoretical musings collapse under the weight of an improperly placed conjunction. Truly, nothing says "creative and interesting" like scrupulously counting manuscript pages to ensure they conform to the divine 1.5-page limit for an introduction. Rest assured that I have taken to heart the sage wisdom of Barney in the following ways.

1. *Introduce the paper to the reader.* The title of the article, "The Unsuccessful Self-Treatment of a Case of 'Writer's Block': A Replication Through the Lens of a Budding Entrepreneurship Scholar Concerned with Originality, Contribution, and Rigor," serves as (a substitute for) the first sentence that introduces the paper to the reader. It immediately sets the context and indicates that the paper will explore writer's block in the context of entrepreneurship research. This aligns with the Barney's advice to specify the theoretical conversation from the outset.
2. *Rest of the first paragraph.* While the article's abstract is empty, the reference to [Upper, 1974](#) and noting this to be a replication study in the title are critical. The title and the single reference work as a satirical way to imply familiarity with the main findings and conclusions in the conversation about writer's block. This minimalist approach parodies the idea of distilling the literature's essential features into a concise introduction.
3. *First word, second paragraph.* The second paragraph of the article is implied rather than explicit. The article's setup inherently signals an unresolved theoretical issue by presenting itself as a replication study. The unresolved issue is the original [Upper \(1974\)](#) study on writer's block, now applied humorously to entrepreneurship research. This satirical framing subtly critiques the redundant nature of replication studies while following the commentary's guideline to introduce an unresolved issue.
4. *Rest of the second paragraph.* The second paragraph's implicit nature through the article's title and concept identifies the critical issue: the difficulty of addressing creative barriers in academic writing, especially in the field of entrepreneurship research. This meets Barney's requirement to establish why this issue is important, using humor to emphasize the struggle of maintaining originality and rigor in academic research.
5. *First sentence, third paragraph.* In the spirit of satire, the article's structure (or lack thereof) mockingly states its purpose. By referencing [Upper, 1974](#) and focusing on writer's block, it sets up a clear, albeit humorous, research question: Can writer's block be treated through a replication study in a different academic context? This approach uses the title to convey its purpose, aligning with the advice to state the research question directly.
6. *Rest of the third paragraph.* The absence of detailed content beyond the title and reference serves as a parody of overly detailed previews. By not summarizing any argument, the article humorously adheres to the Barney's advice against overloading the introduction with detail, instead offering a stark, minimalist example of the extreme.
7. *Length and style.* The article's brevity is a satirical take on the commentary's emphasis on concise introductions. It mocks the notion that introductions should be succinct and clear by presenting an introduction that is excessively succinct. This exaggeration highlights the balance between brevity and necessary detail, poking fun at the sometimes overly prescriptive nature of academic writing guidelines.

In general, the article uses satire to align—at least in spirit, if not fully in content—with [Barney's \(2018\)](#) recommendations on writing introductions. By exaggerating minimalism and replication, it humorously critiques academic conventions and the often redundant nature of scholarly work.

Huff (1999)

Revisiting Huff's insights on writing for scholarly publication takes me back to my doctoral studies. Her thoughtful recommendations, as outlined in her book, hold a special place in my heart, reminiscent of the inexpensive NY-style cheese pizza slices and stuffed Chinese takeaway boxes that sustained me during that period. My work aligns with Huff's approach to academic writing in several key ways.

1. *Creativity within rules.* The article demonstrates creativity within the framework of academic writing rules. While academic writing has its own ground rules, such as rigor, clarity, and adherence to scholarly conventions, the article employs humor and a unique perspective on a serious topic (writer's block in entrepreneurship research) to engage readers. This aligns with the idea that creativity can flourish within the boundaries of academic norms.
2. *Interaction and engagement.* Huff emphasizes the importance of interaction with other scholars and engaging readers effectively. The article aims to provoke thought and discussion among scholars by challenging traditional notions of scholarly work and academic publishing norms. The combined article and cover letter encourage a dialogue on the pressures faced by scholars and the need for a more inclusive and supportive academic environment.
3. *Publication process guidance.* Huff's practical guide for students and scholars covers the entire writing and publication process, from choosing a subject to submitting the final manuscript. Similarly, the cover letter accompanying the article outlines the manuscript's journey and the intended impact on the field of entrepreneurship research. This demonstrates an understanding of the process and a strategic approach to navigating scholarly publication.
4. *Improving writing skills.* Huff shows scholars how to improve their writing skills by selecting appropriate literature, focusing research questions effectively, and influencing how those questions are answered. The article, while unconventional in its approach, reflects

a deliberate effort to engage with existing literature (referencing Upper's work) and provoke critical thinking about scholarly practices.

5. *Balance of seriousness and creativity.* The article and cover letter strike a balance between seriousness and creativity. They address a significant topic (writer's block) in a humorous yet thought-provoking manner, challenging the notion that academic writing must always be serious and devoid of levity. This aligns with Huff's premise that effective scholarship involves following the rules of good conversation, which includes being engaging and thought-provoking.

In essence, while the article and cover letter may diverge from traditional scholarly formats in their approach, they ultimately align with Huff's principles by advocating for creativity, critical engagement with scholarly norms, and the importance of effective communication in academic writing and publishing. They encourage scholars to rethink established practices and embrace innovation while navigating the complexities of scholarly discourse.

Lange and Pfarrer (2017)

Thank you for the opportunity to demonstrate how my work aligns with the five sacred commandments of article composition, as handed down in the commentary by the venerable Lange and Pfarrer (2017). It seems these commandments have become quite popular, either because they are the new rage among reviewers fresh out of their doctoral programs or because, well, reviewers aren't paying close attention to the manuscripts they are critiquing. Despite the commentary's inexplicable fixation on feline flaying (noting the skinning of cats no less than 10 times on the opening page), I assure you that I've taken to heart their quintessential points. Between my article and associated cover letter, these commandments have been meticulously adhered to as follows.

1. *Common ground.* The article establishes common ground by referencing Upper, 1974 well-known work on writer's block, which is widely recognized across disciplines. It connects this familiar concept to the field of entrepreneurship research, suggesting parallels in the creative challenges faced by scholars in various areas. By framing the manuscript around a well-known psychological phenomenon, the article establishes a starting point that readers can relate to, thereby aligning their perspective with the intended exploration.
2. *Complication.* The complication introduced is the exploration of writer's block within the context of entrepreneurship research. The article provocatively challenges the conventional expectations of scholarly publications by suggesting that the absence of traditional content can itself be a form of commentary. This unconventional approach complicates the reader's expectations of what constitutes meaningful research and invites reflection on the norms and pressures within academia.
3. *Concern.* The concern addressed in the cover letter revolves around the constraints and pressures faced by entrepreneurship scholars, particularly regarding the pursuit of originality and meaningful contributions amidst academic expectations. It critiques the tendency towards incrementalism and conformity in research topics and methodologies, suggesting that humor and unconventional approaches may offer pathways to break free from these constraints and stimulate creativity.
4. *Course of action.* The course of action proposed is implicit in the article's submission: to challenge the status quo of academic publishing norms by humorously presenting a manuscript that deliberately lacks traditional scholarly content. This approach aims to provoke thought and discussion about the boundaries of academic rigor and the potential for creativity in scholarly endeavors, particularly within the field of entrepreneurship.
5. *Contribution.* Despite taking an unconventional approach, the article suggests a contribution to the literature by advocating for the integration of humor and playfulness in academic discourse, especially in fields like entrepreneurship that may benefit from more creative approaches. It argues that such approaches can lead to genuinely innovative research directions and enrich the scholarly conversation by encouraging scholars to explore unconventional ideas and perspectives.

In summary, while the article and cover letter take a humorous and unconventional approach, they engage with the five building blocks by establishing common ground, introducing a complication in scholarly norms, addressing concerns about academic creativity and rigor, implicitly outlining a course of action through its submission, and proposing a contribution by advocating for more playful and creative scholarly practices. This demonstrates a deliberate attempt to provoke thought and potentially influence how scholars perceive and conduct research in entrepreneurship and beyond.

Overall, I trust you now perceive how my work embodies "the power and beauty of rigorous exploration" for which you so eloquently advocate.

In all seriousness and with genuine appreciation, I extend my thanks to Reviewer 2 for crafting such a masterful caricature of quintessential reviewer comments. Replying to this feedback presented a delightful departure from the usual tightrope walk authors perform in responding to critiques, where sarcasm remains bottled up as a secret temptation that is unable to be expressed.

Concluding Comment to the Editor

Finally, I extend heartfelt gratitude to the Editor, whose decision, along with the insightful and satirical feedback from the reviewers, not only granted this unconventional article a chance at publication but pushed for its content to be enriched with even greater levels of thought-provocation and humor than initially envisioned. The approach taken by the Editor in handling this submission is a perfect example of the "Yes, and ..." principle!

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Keith M. Hmieleski: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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