

Carving Out Space For Self-Expression in Academia with PhD Researchers

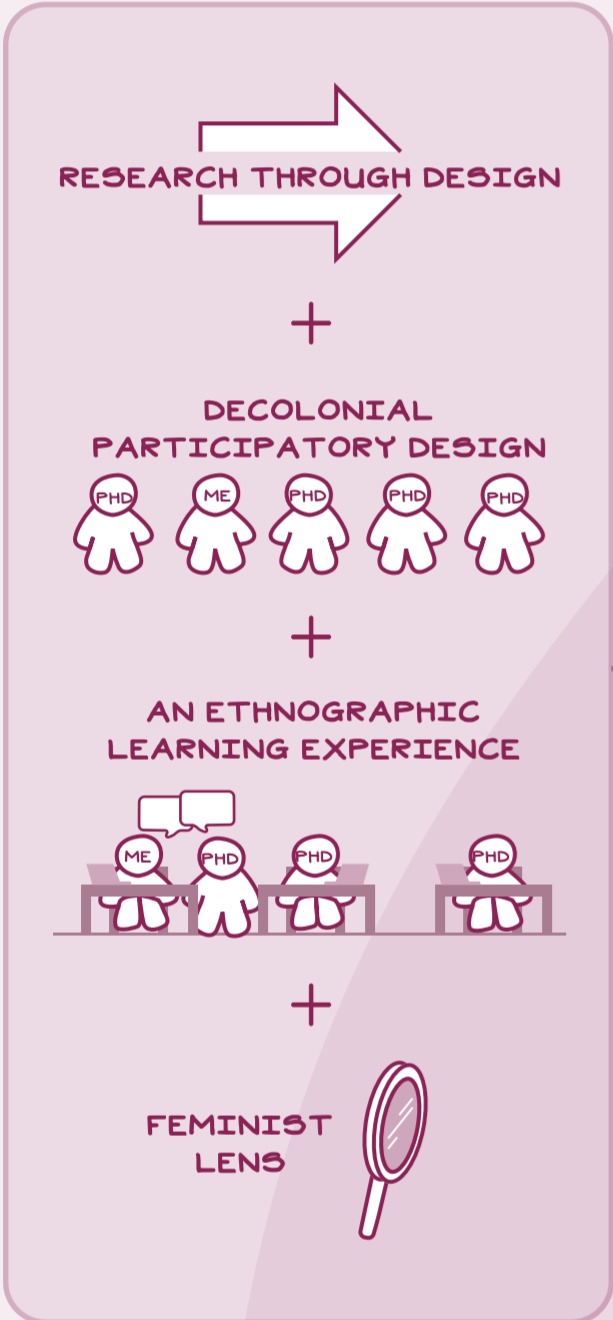
Mapping How Social Interactions Shape The Shift From Imposterism To Expression In Academic Life

From Holding Back And Feeling Out Of Place...

In academia, many PhDs find themselves holding back, whether it's **silencing their opinions**, **doubting their abilities**, or **feeling like they don't truly belong**. Social and institutional pressures often make it hard to show up authentically, leaving people caught between expectations and their own needs.

Over time, this creates **isolation**, weakens **self-belief**, and makes successes feel **undeserved**. When expression is stifled, the space for **connection** and **growth** narrows, and the sense of being "an imposter" begins to take root.

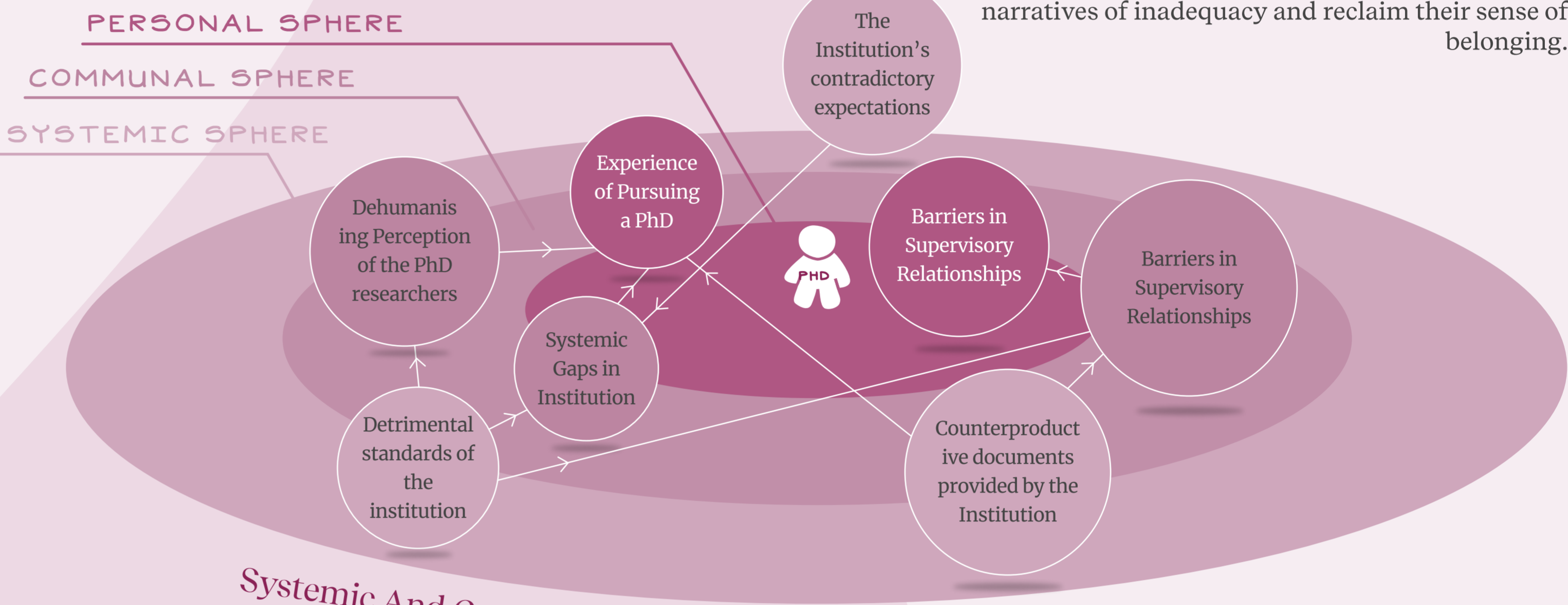
Research Approach



This thesis was a **journey** of questioning the norms and exploring “What is it about academia that makes PhD researchers feel like imposters? And how can we move from silencing our needs to expressing ourselves authentically?”

“How are these two questions connected?”, you might ask. Our social spaces, shaped by relationships, norms, and power dynamics, play a crucial role in how we see ourselves and our worth. **When these spaces are dominated by stigma, stereotypes, and unsaid expectations, they lead to self-silencing and lowered self-efficacy. This is where imposter phenomenon takes root.**

By **intentionally designing work environments** that foster **connection, dialogue, and authentic expression**, we create pathways out of isolation and self-doubt, enabling people to resist internalised narratives of inadequacy and reclaim their sense of belonging.

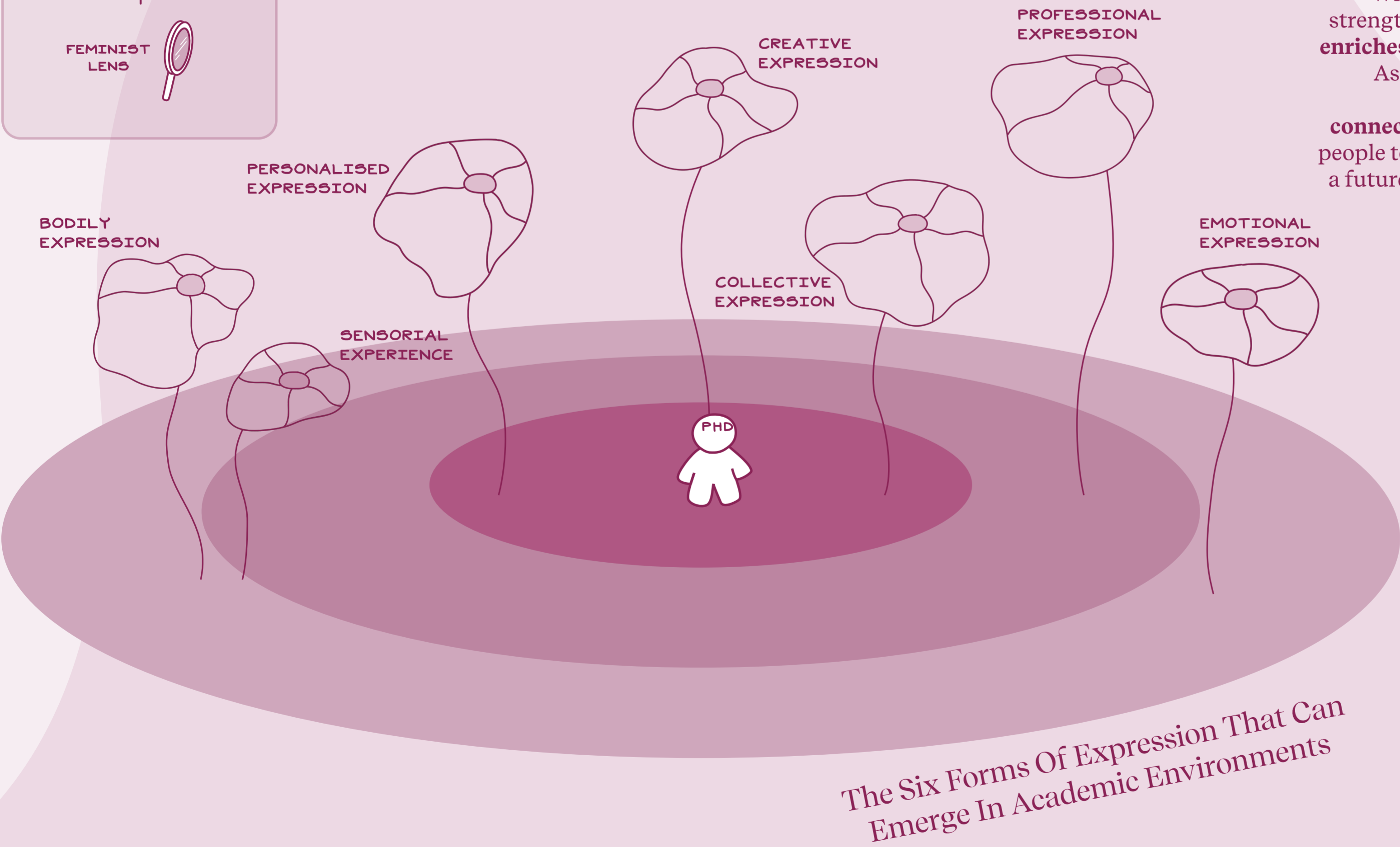


Systemic And Communal Tensions Experienced By The PhDs In IDE

The PhDs' insights during a co-creation workshop brought about six different types of expression that is needed to emerge within academic spaces. These forms of expression don't exist in isolation. Instead, **they bloom together** to create a sense of **belonging and possibility**.

When one form is nurtured, it often unlocks or strengthens the others, creating a ripple effect that **enriches both personal and collective experiences**. As these forms of expression continue to grow together, they can replace **isolation with connection, strengthen self-belief**, and encourage people to **share their authentic selves**, which builds a future where **imposter-related feelings and self-silencing have less space to take root**.

...To Finding Six Ways To Express Yourself And Connect In Academia



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