RESEARCH ARTICLE

Bullying Is Not Tolerated Here: We Have Policies and Procedures Which Protect Staff. An Auto-Ethnography of Frustration

Margaret Sims

Department of Social Sciences and Education, University of New England, Australia

Abstract

This paper holds to account the ideas legitimising staff management practices currently experienced in my workplace, a university, as bullying. Making these practices visible, and locating them in theories allows movement beyond current understandings of reality and points "to new ways of thinking and action about freedom, civic courage, social responsibility, and justice" [1]. Whilst this is titled a story of frustration I aim at a position of hope using auto-ethnography to reflect on my experiences as a volunteer case worker for the staff union (National Tertiary Education Union - NTEU). I have supported staff complaining of bullying in the workplace and have struggled to achieve fair and equitable outcomes. I have witnessed hard working, valued colleagues becoming disenchanted, disengaged, and resigning. Accepting this without attempting to drive change is unacceptable, thus this study was born. I locate this work in literature related to workplace bullying and the Australian higher education context. I explore my reflections, examining how these link to, and extend understandings of theory. Finally I explain why I think workplace bullying needs redefinition in order for us to enliven democracy as a way of life for those of us working in the university context.

Keywords: Workplace Bullying, Neoliberalism, Figured World, Anxiety, Psychological Demands

Introduction

Half of all Australian workers experience workplace bullying [2] making this a significant problem. Organisational disadvantages include: declining worker co-operation with managers, rules and procedures; increased staff turnover leading to higher recruitment, employment and training costs; increased use of sick leave; increased expenses associated with managing complaints, potentially increased legal expenses when these claims are taken outside of the organisation; and a decline in public reputation [3]. Workers who are bullied tend to be more likely to plan to leave [4] and less likely to actively engage in their employment [5] impacting on productivity and organisational efficiency. Conversely, resignation leaves bullying unrecognised and thus it is more likely "to continue unchallenged and unchecked as part of the new 'normal' management" [6] placing others at risk and enhancing the toxicity of the work environment.

Workers who are bullied are likely to feel stressed and this impacts on their health and wellbeing [7]. Verkuil et al. [8] Identified significant impacts on levels of depression, stress-related psychological complaints and anxiety. Bullying-related depression is thought to cost Australian employers around $AU693 million per year in lost productivity [9]. Challenges to workers' health and wellbeing are found to be greater when bullying originates from the supervisor [10] and impacts persist over time: Einarsen and Nielsen [11] tracked these

over 5 years. Workplace bullying increases the risk of workers engaging in suicide ideation [11, 12].

There are many different theoretical models used to frame workplace bullying. Bullying can be positioned as a serious problem in interpersonal communication and interpersonal relationships [12] or something elicited by the behaviour of the targeted person [13, 14]. It can be seen as enactment of social dominance, often in terms of gender or racial diversity [15] or an abuse of power [16]. The Job-Demand-Control-Support Model proposes high levels of psychological demands, lack of control and low supervisor support combine to create a context for bullying [17, 18].

Workers in higher education may face more bullying than is common in other workplaces [19, 20] perhaps because bullying is "hardwired into the organisational structure" [21]. Linked to this is the claim that Australian academics are subject to the tightest form of managerialism in the western world [22]. Given the ongoing financial crisis experienced by Australian higher education institutions [23], resolving issues of bullying is critically important in maintaining a dedicated workforce, committed to their sector and able to deliver high quality work.

Context

Locating bullying in the research context

The standard definition of bullying, used in most jurisdictions, is from the ILO:

Workplace bullying constitutes offensive behaviour through vindictive, cruel, malicious or humiliating attempts to undermine an individual or groups of employees. Such persistently negative attacks on their personal and professional performance are typically unpredictable, irrational and unfair [24].

Safe Work Australia add psychological dimensions to this definition [25]. The Australian Government claim a no tolerance approach to workplace bullying [26] yet it is clear workers are not protected under current rules (see Sally McManus, Australian Council of Trade Unions President) and managers have increasing power whilst workers have less [27].

Too many workers are now required to do whatever they are asked to do, virtually whenever they are asked to do it…. Few workers believe that if they have a dispute at work it can be resolved.

Unions NSW *Dignity and Respect in the Workplace Charter* [28] defines bullying as repeated; unwelcome and unsolicited; experienced as offensive, intimidating, humiliating or threatening. Woodrow and Guest [29] suggest adding threats to professional status and/or personal standing, isolation, overwork, and employment instability to the definition of bullying.

In this study I aim to call upon my experience as a volunteer case worker for the NTEU in supporting staff who have experienced bullying (or what they believe is bullying) and reflect on how these experiences contribute to a changing understanding of what bullying is, and how it is experienced by its targets. I hope that a more nuanced understanding of bullying may contribute towards the development of improved strategies for changing practice.

Conceptual Framing and Methodology

Stories are important in providing an opportunity to theorise, and through this to work towards change. Theory provides a guide for thinking about the experiences contained in a story [30] and situates the story (auto) into culture (ethno) and method (graphy) [31]. I have positioned this study in the frame of analytic auto-ethnography as this approach bridges "lessons of personal experience with the intellectual and political commitments" of theory and practice [30].

I have chosen to use the theoretical frame of figured worlds as proposed by Holland et al. [32] and further discussed by Pennington and Prater [33]. Figured worlds are socio-culturally constructed contexts where actors are assigned certain roles which shape their actions and it is through these actions that the relative positions of participants are iteratively constructed. In the spaces created by figured worlds some actors and actions are deemed more important than others. This kind of inequity is identified as the inevitable consequence of neoliberalism, thus neoliberalism can be positioned as a figured world that creates spaces in which people act. Neoliberalism, here understood as incorporating "social relations reimaged as commercial transactions; people redesignated as human capital" [34] has permeated every element of our lives. In the neoliberal managerial figured world workers are positioned as potential trouble-makers who require supervision in order to perform effectively [35, 36]. Management focus on 'span of control': the ideal number of people reporting to any particular manager. Academics operating in this figured world experience this as micro-management and de-professionalization [22, 37, 38].

Academics are no longer trusted to make decisions about their work; rather external accrediting bodies and/or the market prescribe curriculum and pedagogy, and quality assurance processes make it impossible to customise teaching and learning to individual cohorts of students let alone individuals. Along with this, "every aspect of academics' professional activity is destabilised-or, rather, constituted-by an incessant round of assessment, evaluation and control" [39]. With funding linked to student retention, quality is increasingly defined as keeping students enrolled no matter the standard of their academic work meaning that academics may be pressured to pass student work of poor quality. Research indicates that de-professionalization tends to result in less productive workers [40], and a shift to a technological delivery of pre-determined content [41]. De-professionalization can even lead to "functional stupidity" [42].

In effect: The scholar has become … the caped penitent, ritualistically submitting themselves to the latest ordeal of evaluation, their guilt already confirmed by the very necessity of the trial [39].

In this figured world, hard evidence is reified and that which can be measured is considered more valuable than that which cannot: emotions are not a valid part of academia [43]. Despite this separation of emotions (such as depression) from academia, depression and neoliberalism are thought to be inevitable partners [44], although academics who feel such emotions are perceived as problematic. Rogers-Vaughn claims these tensions have resulted in a "global epidemic of depression [45]." The hegemonic rejection of emotions and the associated individualism leads to a rejection of collegiality [46]. Academics are required to judge their own performance in competition with others [47], and are regarded as the human capital owned by the university: human capital expected to strive to meet increasing demands irrespective of the cost to themselves [48].

In this figured world caring for others is positioned as a sacrifice, as an act against one's best interests [49]. Care should only take place within the family or be purchased through the market, it is thus outsourced and not the responsibility of employers. In challenging this, Tronto argues that care is an essential element of our humanity and that democratic caring offers an alternative to neoliberalism [49]. Thus in constructing my story I believe it important to include the element of care and

the emotions that are associated with this: how I feel about my experiences. This position is supported by Benoot and Bilsen who argue auto-ethnographical stories are more powerful when they contain reflections on personal emotions along with embodied acts [31]. Moffatt argue the creation of emotional space is an essential strategy for "educators to reconsider and resist the difficult effects of neoliberal change [48]." Thus in telling my stories within the figured world of Australian higher education and my particular institution, I have chosen to focus on the emotional impacts of my experiences rather than simply reciting events as they occurred.

I position this research somewhere closer to Stahlke Wall's [50] definition of analytic auto-ethnography given my aim of linking my experiences to theory with the purpose of gaining understanding of how to address bullying, but explicitly including my feelings in the stories and in the analysis. In establishing rigour I have chosen to address the criteria identified by Loh [51], namely:

1. That the research rings true [52] to the readers

2. That the research helps others both understand bullying in academia and helps identify potential ways of addressing this problem

Both criteria can only be verified by those reading the research. To help me check that the research is rigorous and that I have adequately protected the identity of those about whom I reflect, I asked fourteen colleagues (from Australia and overseas) to read the draft. Their comments have been taken into account in the final version.

Ethical Considerations

While auto-ethnography is not subject to traditional ethic committee approvals [50], it is important care is taken to protect the identities of any who are included in the personal stories; particularly pertinent given the identity and location of the author are public. To manage this risk I have taken care to anonymise both the positions and school/directorate location of those about whom I write. I refer to all whose location in the hierarchy is 'above' mine as Senior Manager (SnMg). The multiple transition arrangements associated with organisational structural change facilitates anonymity of SnMgs: beginning with no faculties and 10 schools (each with a Head and Deputy Heads reporting directly to the Deputy Vice Chancellor), and now 3 Faculties, each with a Dean, Associate Deans, and in some, Deputy Associate Deans and Deputy Deans. Each current faculty contains 2-3 schools each with a Head and Deputy Head. Staff in schools is placed in small groups under the supervision of a Discipline Cluster Leader. Over the past 12 months one school has had 5 different Heads of School, answerable to 3 different Deans who were answerable to 3 different Deputy Vice Chancellors. To further protect the identity of those included in my reflections I will ensure that I do not identify when in the past three years my reflections address. Thus by not identifying SnMgs in their location, role, or time, coupled with turn-over in positions and varying transition arrangements, I believe it possible

to adequately protect the identity of those SnMgs to whom I refer. In addition I will focus less on a retelling of events and more upon the emotional impact of these events on me and the ways in which I link these experiences to theory, thus, I believe, creating a further layer of protection for those inevitably captured in my reflections.

Results

I have used italics to identify my reflections, written in the past tense.

Lack of agency

I was granted approval to attend a conference but told to ensure all my teaching materials were ready before I left as the conference was immediately before Orientation Week. When I read this I felt angry and dis-respected. The comment niggled and continued to bother me. Over a period of several weeks it became clearer to me: what bothered me was the positioning of me as incompetent; someone who, despite many years in academia, was likely to run off without fulfilling work responsibilities. I felt indignant because I have never done this in the past and don't believe I needed to be told this time.

Such an event, viewed in isolation, is minor. However, this is not the only example of the way in which academic agency as professional is being continually eroded. *External accreditation bodies told me what content I had to cover in my teaching: gone are the days when I developed whole degrees in consultation with others in the field, based on my own expert knowledge. What I teach has increasingly become what is "officially spoken about and recognised" [53] not what I think is important. When I completed accreditation documents I was told by others what language I had to use. I was called to compulsory school meetings at 24 hours' notice (an attendance list was kept) without recognition that I might have other commitments that are difficult to change with that degree of notice. I have supported staffs that have had elements of their official unit outlines (from which one must not deviate when teaching) changed without their consent (or knowledge) in ways that radically impacted not only on their individual teaching, but on the ways in which their unit meshed with other units in the course. I have supported staffs that were refused permission to attend conferences when others in their team were given permission in a context where all were engaged in teaching at the time. I have supported staff who have had teaching in their area of expertise stripped from them (despite ongoing good unit evaluations), and being allocated alternative teaching outside their area of expertise. I feel despair as I review the examples.*

The repeated implication in all of this is that my colleagues and I are incompetent, that we cannot be trusted to do our jobs without someone standing over us, checking on us. Our agency, as academics and professionals, is being constantly eroded. This erosion of agency is recognised as a key contributor to bullying in the Job-Demand-Control-Support Model [17] and is positioned by some as de-professionalization [54, 55]. This de-professionalization links to Woodrow and Guest's [29]

identification of threats to professional status and personal integrity as elements of bullying. De-professionalization is turning education into a technocratic profession [56], reflected in the increasing push for a model of teaching and learning where academics are responsible for developing teaching materials but the actual teaching is thought to be less expensively delivered by some kind of para-professional, potentially at the expense of quality.

In discussions with a variety of SnMgs I am constantly told these kinds of decisions are "management prerogative". This is reinforced by Safe Work Australia [25] who write: management "actions are not workplace bullying if they are carried out in a lawful and reasonable way, taking the particular circumstances into account." The determination of what is reasonable in any particular circumstance can be challenged in a Court of Law, but it is often interpreted by the Judge in the light of what a "reasonable person" [57] might understand in the circumstances pertaining at the time, what is usual, reasonably foreseeable and what are the reasonable expectations of the behaviour of an average person in the circumstances (not what might be the ideal behaviour expected) [58].

In my experience management prerogative was used to justify the refusal to grant staff annual leave on the grounds of "operational reasons." Operational reasons mean an academic cannot be spared for one day before a long weekend despite organising a colleague to go onto the digital learning platform on that day and answer any student questions). It means it was deemed appropriate to remove funding from a course before the required case was presented to Academic Board. It means it is acceptable to take a unit off a staff member on the Friday before units were made available to students and allocate this staff member another unit. These "operational requirements" did not benefit the area financially as the long term casual staffs that developed and taught one unit were displaced, and a new casual staff had to be found to take on the unit compulsorily relinquished. The operational requirements in this case appeared to be focused around allocating teaching in the area of appointment rather than the area of expertise. Simultaneously, in the same work area, other staff teaching across different areas was not subject to the same "operational requirements." Such decisions are management prerogative and the SnMgs with whom I discussed these refused to accept they were bullying because "operational requirements" (however undefined and unarticulated) were understood as being reasonable managerial actions.

Some time ago I attended a course on bullying and my attention was drawn to the NSW Work Health and Safety Act [28] and the provisions that enabled bullying to be positioned as a WHS issue. We were encouraged to use this legislation as a way of addressing bullying. I came back enthusiastic to do so and found the relevant forms for reporting incidents. Within a week of sharing this strategy with others the forms were removed. Despite the strength of the legislation, and the clear guidance in the Safe Work Australia [25] guidelines, any attempts I subsequently made to support colleagues through a WHS-framed complaint for bullying failed as each time it was determined that the alleged bullying behaviour was reasonable and within management prerogative.

I understand that management have the right to make decisions, even if those decisions are bad ones. What I find more difficult to understand is the expectation that directions are expected to be accepted without question, despite the requirement in the university's Code of Conduct for decision-making to be transparent and despite what I consider clear failure in the "reasonable person" test. It appears that "operational requirements" is the new transparency-without any explanation as to what those operational requirements might actually be. I am told that questioning these is tantamount to bullying: in other words requesting an explanation as to the grounds on which a decision is made (transparency in the Code of Conduct) is now positioned as staff bullying management. Such a reversal is identified as a form of bullying in itself [20].

Victim blaming

Under neoliberalism, individuals are positioned as responsible for their choices, their actions and their lives in a manner that completely disregards the systemic constraints that act upon them [59]. For example, White and Wastell [60] argue that the state continues to engage in "more coercive and controlling social engineering" aimed at shaping citizens to acquire what are deemed the necessary attributes and skills for an employable citizen [53]. Those who fail "are responsible for their own shortcomings" [59] and should be taught to improve.

Research into workplace bullying often focuses on the individual and their coping skills [61] or the emotional intelligence [62] needed to manage these experiences, though it is acknowledged that the workplace climate impacts on workers' ability to engage their coping skills [63]. I see this position of individualising blame and placing it on the target reflected in the way SnMgs have responded to claims of bullying. From my experience the script goes something like this:

- It's management's prerogative to make decisions (even if the decision is bad, and/or fails the "reasonable person" test)

- If you are unhappy with the decision or claim you are being bullied then you need to understand the correct definition of bullying

- The solution is therefore an email to everyone with the legal definition of bullying and/or to make them attend compulsory training on the Code of Conduct (both of these were SnMg actions following my claims of systemic and ongoing bullying)

- If you are unhappy with the decision or claim you are being bullied then you need to improve how you operate in the modern organisation

- Therefore you need to undertake some professional development which your employer will provide: courses such as "Conversational Intelligence," "Managing

change," "Leading myself through change" and "Well-being and resilience" (again, I am not claiming cause and effect but I note that courses such as these were advertised to staff not long after a discussion I had with a SnMg regarding systemic and ongoing bullying).

In this positioning, systemic bullying is denied; rather it is believed that employees are not adequately prepared to work in the organisation. This is strongly evident in the work of Zabrodska et al. [6] who argue that identifying oneself as a target of bullying risks positioning oneself "as a 'failed' person, not as competent enough to belong to the group of other 'legitimate' academics."

I recall a comment made by a SnMg in a large meeting that academics who could not continue to deliver high quality teaching and learning to students in the context of dramatically increased workloads and an academic restructure that left lines of reporting unclear for several months would be subject to a charge of misconduct.

A good employee is expected to accept a decision made by a manager without question, and to act upon that decision. Managers do not perceive themselves as intending to do harm and rationalise their behaviours [64] using terms such as 'operational reasons'. Bullying is delivered in exquisitely polite emails and other forms of communication that on the surface appear totally benign, so that opposition to these demands appears unreasonable and unprofessional. Managers are not bullying, they are exercising management prerogative.

Many of the key thinkers of our time are now demonstrating how neoliberal ideology shapes an education system which acts to create graduates who will happily fulfil this disempowering subordinate role. Chomsky, who is sometimes positioned as the American Socrates [65] writes: "As long as the general population is passive, apathetic, and diverted to consumerism or hatred of the vulnerable, then the powerful can do as they please, and those who survive will be left to contemplate the outcome" [66]. The ideal citizen in this discourse is shaped through an education system that uses national definitions of desired learning outcomes measured through pre-determined behavioural indicators using a positivist discourse of quality [67, 68].

Discussion of results

Bullying is made invisible

I reflect on how difficult bullying is to establish and thus how easy it is for SnMgs to dismiss complaints when they are laid.

I was told by a SnMg that there were no official bullying complaints on record when I knew I had recently worked on two (the outcome of which was allocation of an alternative supervisor through the official process) and had sat in a room with another colleague who stated clearly to this same SnMg: "I do not feel professionally safe in my supervisory relationship".

In reflecting on this part of my story I recall the work of Riemer [39] who argues procedures aimed at protecting staff from bullying actually enable it. In this case, despite many attempts to use the complaints procedures available through the Enterprise Agreement and citing breaches of the university's Code of Conduct, my colleague was not protected. My story suggests to me this code is not worth the e-paper upon which it is written. My colleague was not afforded the right to have his/her voice heard, was not shown respect, and was not afforded a safe working environment. Lipton [69] suggests outcomes such as this arise from the neoliberal perversion of such rules, policies and procedures. Principles become subsumed into managerialism to the point where, I suggest, they are meaningless. These processes are not useful in addressing bullying because they function to make bullying itself invisible. As suggested by a participant in the Woodrow and Guest [29] study, such policies are "just talk" and that reporting bullying is not effective because "senior managers were not interested in whether staffs were being bullied, so long as the work was being done". Instead, the technical rationality of the neoliberal figured world makes it likely that SnMgs actually believe that "what they are doing is not only procedurally correct, but, in fact, good" [70].

In not taking a stand (by not proactively engaging in preventative measures, by justifying actions as management prerogative) a context is created where "monstrosities are normalised" [34]. This normalising of neoliberal performativity creates a context where bullying behaviours are invisible because they are so normal, so ubiquitous. Such a normalising arises from the very foundation of neoliberalism which positions inequity as desirable [34]. SnMgs are insulated from those they manage by the belief that they are superior [20, 22], they are different, and it is their very difference that enables the university to thrive. In this context, the performance of management is often perceived by its recipients as violent [48], uncaring, and, I propose, bullying. Through this normalisation "the majority of victim claims are suppressed, negated, or erased" [71]. The invisibility of bullying, failing to name the behaviour as bullying, not only serves validate it but to increase the likelihood of it continuing [72].

Privilege and management-speak

This inability to operate effectively is reinforced by the operation of privilege. Being part of a senior management group affords a kind of privilege that is becoming so habitual and so embedded in the figured world of universities of those in the role that they can no longer see how their privilege operates [73]. As beneficiaries of that privilege SnMgs have no interest in examining their position nor of engaging with any criticism of it, rather they actively seek to maintain it. Giroux claims they "have sold themselves to corporate power [1]."

Language is a powerful tool that helps shape figured worlds. Foucault [74] argues that discourses in effect define the "playing field" [32] of figured worlds through the way it defines truth, knowledge, regulations, norms and power. In reflecting on this I realise how SnMgs create management-speak that does exactly this.

Management-speak, in my experience on the receiving end, involves reframing issues: eg, increasing staff workload becomes seeking flexibility through 'modernising' the workload clauses in the staff Enterprise Agreement-later experience suggests that the term 'modernising' itself appeared to mean removing any clauses in the Agreement that regulate workload; consulting staff becomes operationalised as large meetings where 75% of the time is spent listening to a generic management-speak presentation, and questions at the end are not answered or answered so blandly that an analysis of the words provides no meaning at all (we want to take a broad brush approach to workload; we aim to copy other universities who have a more flexible workload model).

This management-speak, I argue is in itself a form of bullying as it shapes our identities as workers in ways detrimental to our well-being. Giroux [1] goes further, positioning this as a strategy hiding "diverse modes of oppression behind false claims of democratization." Smyth [22] writes universities "are covering their tracks by using 'spin' to disguise practices that are qualitatively little different in their intent to practices exercised by nightclub bouncers." As a result, those on the receiving end of management-speak internalise their inferior position in a manner similar to the internalised oppression postulated by Berman and Paradies [75]. As a consequence highly competent professionals lose confidence in their own "relevance and purpose" [76].

In my figured world, SnMgs regularly communicate with what I experience as super-polite micro-managing derogation. Staffs are no longer to be trusted [77], but rather have to be closely supervised to prevent them doing the 'wrong thing.' *I applied for leave as is my statutory entitlement. I was told with exquisite politeness that my application cannot be approved until I put in writing that (a) I am not seeking leave in my teaching trimesters and (b) that there is a named person willing to be my on-campus contact person (as if in my entire academic career I have ever abandoned students in order to take leave). In another example, the management-speak discourse expected I should welcome an increase in my teaching load, and I should feel grateful that I have been 'consulted' on this matter (remembering that this 'consultation' involved being told that current workloads are not sustainable-without provision of any evidence). My feelings of anger were not legitimate and should I continue to feel disrespected and angry then I am clearly a trouble maker, one who resists the kinds of changes that are absolutely necessary to keep the university (and the privileged position of its SnMgs) afloat.*

Because I was now a trouble-maker, it was appropriate that my voice was silenced (in one meeting it was ruled I was forbidden to put a contrary position because the report under discussion was a SnMg report and thus the view of this SnMg is the only one that should be heard). In this context it is perhaps pertinent to report what is public information: namely the attempt of the Chancellor to remove me from the University Council because of a claimed conflict of interest with my role as President of the local Branch of the NTEU.

Silencing is particularly troubling given the positioning of unions in neoliberal discourse. Monbiot [34] claims the aim of neoliberalism is "to destroy the collective bargaining power of workers, removing the primary source of resistance to the power" of the privileged. Given the refusal to recognise bullying, the concerted efforts to break unions whose collective power has traditionally been used to support the rights of workers, and difficulties in 'proving' that bullying actually happens, I reflect on how we can work towards change. The first step in the process I believe is to extend the definitions of bullying.

Conclusion

What is bullying in the university context? In reflecting on my experiences I have come to see that bullying is not always about one perpetrator and one victim as is most often positioned in the literature. I suggest we conceptualise bullying as something that has become embedded in the system in which we operate. There are multiple perpetrators willing to impose systemic demands on staff. Given the legal definitions of the term 'bullying' I suggest that it is now necessary to create a new term that recognises this systemic bullying and recommend (thanks to my colleagues in our brains trust) the term SOoB (Systemic Operationalisation of Bullying).

In the current context where bullying remains defined as dyadic, cases against individual perpetrators are weak; bullying is initiated from many sources simultaneously and the impact of these multiple actions is substantial. In a sense bullying has become something like dripping water from multiple taps that gradually wears away rock. When you are told again and again, indirectly and directly, you are incompetent, you need to work smarter, you can't be trusted so need to run every decision past your manager, eventually those messages sink in and you feel disempowered. For example, Edwards [76] reflects on her unravelling as a consequence of "multiple smaller events" piling "up on each other over time." In the words of one academic (used with permission): "It has led me, at times, to think I am in the wrong profession, I need to look for employment elsewhere, and doubt my ability in all areas of my work. This is despite the fact that this year I have worked harder than ever, completing my PhD, receiving good teaching evaluations, enough publications and ongoing community and UNE service." Graber [78] talked about how so much energy is spent on trying to understand the apparently senseless bureaucratic requirements imposed on one that there is little brain power left for critical thinking. Freire [79] claimed those who are oppressed gradually internalise the messages of their own failure and begin to live that failure. This is what I see happening in universities (and it is probably the same in other organisations but these are not in my direct, recent experience). Smyth [22] suggests that it is "not that university managers are necessarily setting out to 'purposefully' engage in bullying, but rather that their tactics are buried in an 'organisational logic' and workplace practices" designed to remove agency. Thus I argue the figured world of contemporary universities creates a context where SOoB is universal, invisible to SnMgs, but traumatising to those on the receiving end.

These messages of incompetence, (defining the role of the ideal worker as one who complies without question, who takes individual responsibility for systemic oppression [SOoB] and accepts that feelings of disenfranchisement and unhappiness are the individual's problem not the system's), are shaped by the ideology of neoliberalism. This way of operating in the world has become so entrenched that it is perceived as the one and only way of being and behaving [80, 81]. Neoliberalism positions ideal citizens as productive employees who seek to maximise their employer's profit in exchange for sufficient material wealth to maintain a high level of consumerism [34].

In this context SOoB has become a necessary strategy to both shape and control workers. The strategies identified by Freire [79] over 40 years ago are the very strategies being used in universities today to deliver SOoB. As Srigley [82] writes in the modern university context: "Freedom of speech is granted only within the mandate, not to speech about the mandate. Which means that all discussion of foundational questions is denied?" This is particularly problematic because of all institutions in our society, universities were originally supposed to be places where academic freedom was the vehicle used to enable our society to contest "knowledge and ideas" [22] in order to create an "informed and reflective citizenry" [1]. This regime of SOoB is now squashing academic freedom [35, 82], and shaping a society where the role of the university in providing checks and balances for our democracy is being destroyed. Because of SOoB many academics are now in a position where they cannot exercise academic freedom [83]. Take for example the casual academic workforce which in Australia now makes up over 50% of academic roles [84]; a much higher rate of casualization than for Australians in general [85]. Casual academics cannot question or criticise their employer, or comment on any issue that might jeopardise their ability to gain the next piece of casual work. SnMgs are increasingly developing (or attempting to insert) clauses in their codes of conduct that make it an offense for employees to make any statements in public that might (potentially) damage the reputation of the employing organisation. Furedi [35] suggests that the "readiness with which universities have been prepared to introduce linguistic governance" is driven by "the premise that members of the academy cannot be trusted to make up their own minds about how to act and speak [35]." Thus the necessity for SnMgs to impose control.

I see the forms of oppression arising from SOoB as so entwined in the neoliberal managerial figured world that they become invisible and therefore legitimised as both normal and a sign of good management practice. In a similar manner Franklin [86] suggests that sexism in higher education is systemic and thus rendered invisible because it is so hegemonic. I argue that extant understandings of bullying are no longer relevant and it is therefore important to reflect on the enculturation of SnMgs who have (willingly or not, consciously or not) taken on the kind of oppressor role Freire [79] identified. Breaking out of this system of oppression requires a multi-pronged approach and a belief that there is hope: there is another way [87].

Ethical leadership, known to have a major impact on employee and organisational wellbeing, includes transparency, justice, rights, shared moral principles and treating others as you would want to be treated yourself [72]. Consulting workers as outlined in the requirements in the NSW Work Health and Safety Act (2011) and as defined in the Act (Section 48) is a key element. Consultation means not only sharing information with workers and eliciting their views, but actually taking these views into account and advising workers of the outcome (presumably including *how and why* their views have been, or not been, taken into account).

We can no longer accept our positioning as "uncritical servants of corporate interests, rendered invisible" [1]. We must collectively refuse to become parties to our own oppression [79]. Instead we should resist and reclaim our agency as professionals who wield discretionary decision-making power. We will no longer talk about students as 'consumers' and our teaching as a 'product; no longer acquiesce to SnMg positioning 'the university' as consisting of themselves (rather than the term 'the university' being used to mean all the stakeholders: SnMgs, staff, students and alumni). We will continue to identify and name SOoB, and use the complaints processes available even when such complaints are rejected by SnMgs. We will support our colleagues to challenge the SOoB "normalising discourses" imposed in SOoB processes.

Our capacity to resist is partly dependent on our ability to process experiences effectively particularly given the normal reaction to a triggering event is often paralysis [76]. Challenging every instance is exhausting and it is those who are discriminated against who are expected to do this additional work in a context where a quarter of academics in Australia are currently working more than 60 hours a week [88]. However, there is evidence that staff empowerment provides a buffer, supporting an ability to react [89, 90]. Resistance to our oppression requires "a combination of hope, vision, courage, and a willingness to make power accountable, all the while connecting with the desires, aspirations, and dreams of those who suffer under the apparatuses of regimes of violence, misery, fear and terror" [1].

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