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"You have a bad attitude": Preparing tutors for gender bias in the writing classroom and writing centre through autoethnography and storytelling

Abstract:
While there is a wealth of professional resources on what to expect in teaching writing (McLeod, 2007; Adler-Kassner & Wardle 2015; Malenczyk, 2016; Rose & Weiser, 1999, 2002, 2010), how to navigate gender bias in the writing classroom and writing centre conference has received less scholarly attention, especially in Australia. Since the emotional turn in writing studies, the place of emotion (Micciche, 2016, 2007, 2002) and the need for resilience training in the preparation of writing instructors (Moore, 2018; Wooten et al, 2020) have been well-documented. However, less well-documented are the potential effects of gender discrimination on the emotional wellbeing and career progression of women in an unprecedented mental health "epidemic" in higher education (Weale 2019). This article recommends storytelling and autoethnography as powerful qualitative methods for helping women process and document their own experiences of gender discrimination, learn from the experiences of others and devise strategies for resilience and self-care – and for helping male colleagues to become better allies.

Biographical note:
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> Although risks are taken by any researcher using a personal experience approach such as autoethnography, there is a place in scholarship for shining the light of research where one stands for attempting to know one's own experience and sharing that knowledge. As qualitative researchers, willing to confess that reality is based on perception, why should we not examine more fully what constitutes our perceptions?
> – Margot Duncan, 2004

> Autoethnography is predicated on the ability to invite readers into the lived experience of a presumed "other" and to experience it viscerally . . . to "give voice" to previously silenced and marginalized experiences, answer unexamined questions about the multiplicity of social identities, instigate discussions about and across difference, and explain the contradictory intersections of personal and cultural standpoints.
> – Robyn M. Boylorn and Mark P. Orbe, 2016

The emotional labour of writing instructors is significant at the best of times and most female academics have a story or two about gender bias on the job, with metaphors ranging from battered wives (Enos & Borrowman, 2008) to mother figures (Jackson, 2018) to kitchen cooks and plate twirlers (George, 1999). Perhaps more than any other field, writing studies holds at its core the powerful distinction that Shirley Rose and Irwin Weiser (2002) draw between "knowing that" and "knowing how", as well as Eileen Maimon's concept of the "home campus ethnographer" (1992), since much of a writing instructor's work is naturally autoethnographic: helping students reflect on their own experiences and stories as the starting point for their writing. As a discipline we have learned a great deal about what can go wrong in writing programs but far less about how to protect ourselves (and our colleagues) when such situations arise: how to respond without reacting and how to depersonalise negative experiences. While confronting – both personally and professionally – my own career trajectory has convinced me that strategies for navigating the emotional labour of writing instruction should feature more prominently in the ways we onboard new staff. This includes incorporating informal ways of knowing into more traditional development programs to increase awareness of gender (and other) discrimination in the classroom.

Given the vulnerabilities inherent in teaching writing, particularly for females, our field needs more such engagement from within the stories and narrative identities of senior female academics. As Michael Pemberton (2011) has lamented, our formal training rarely prepares us for the parts of our jobs that will demand the most time and energy. And while our field is saturated with fine theoretical work on nearly every aspect of teaching writing, including reference guides (McLeod, 2007; Malenczyk, 2017), writing and disciplinarity (Malenczyk, Miller-Cochran,Wardle & Yancey, 2018), labour and social justice issues (McClure, Goldstein & Pemberton, 2017; Khan, Lalicker & Lynch-Biniek, 2017; Reyes, 2021; Lockett et al, 2021), institutional mission (Janangelo, 2016), and bullying (Elder & Davila, 2019), there are far fewer accounts of women's experiences in navigating gender bias in the classroom and writing centre. Notable collections include *Sexual Harassment*

and Cultural Change in Writing Studies: Practices and Possibilities (Ericsson, 2020), *The Things We Carry: Strategies for Recognizing and Negotiation Emotional Labor in Writing Program Administration* (Wooten et al, 2020), and *Gender Roles and Faculty Lives in Rhetoric and Composition* (Enos, 1997).

Other collections demonstrate the power of memoir and storytelling on a range of topics: the triumphs and travails of independent writing programs (O'Neill, Crowe & Burton, 2002; Everett & Hanganu-Bresch, 2017), stories of the discipline (Roen, Brown & Enos, 1998) and the working lives of writing centre directors (Caswell, McKinney & Jackson, 2016). In the preface of *Living Rhetoric and Composition: Stories of the Discipline* (1998), the editors reveal how a similar collection in the field of Philosophy, *Falling in Love with Wisdom: American Philosophers Talk about their Calling* (Karnos & Shoemaker, 1994), inspired their work. They argue that every discipline needs such a volume to preserve the "voices" of its pioneers and leaders – complete with personal anecdotes and reflections – and document changes in the field as a way of preparing their successors for the challenges they may face. Most importantly, these firsthand narratives demonstrate more convincingly than purely theoretical work how the "professional and personal lives [of scholars] intertwine" (p. 5). However, the changing face of higher education, along with my own experience and the experience of female colleagues, has left me wondering specifically about the less celebrated stories: the moments that caused seasoned female academics to contemplate giving up and what made them decide to stay the course.

Higher degree research (HDR) student progression and retention data from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Sydney between 2017 and 2020 suggests that female HDR students are less likely to receive scholarships and more likely to discontinue or pause their study when compared with their male counterparts. Furthermore, female academics are less likely to pursue timely promotions. Francis and Stultz (2020) report numerous barriers to promotion for female academics, including caring for young children and/or aging parents, systemic bullying and discrimination that depletes confidence and diminishes support structures necessary for promotion, and gender bias in letters of recommendation for promotion, with letters in support of women containing more "negativity, hedges and faint praise" than their male counterparts (p. 49).

Like the *Stories of the Discipline* (Roen, Brown & Enos, 1998) editors, I was inspired by another volume: *Any Ordinary Day: Blindsides, Resilience, and What Happens After the Worst Day of Your Life* (Sales, 2018), which a colleague had recommended to me during the most difficult period of my career, when I was contemplating leaving academia. When the situation eventually impeded my research I sought advice from trusted senior female mentors in the field. The more I shared with these prominent women – some of them retired after long and distinguished careers – the more they revealed about their own professional difficulties, some of them disclosing personal details of similar struggles and others identifying themselves as the authors of published anonymised narratives exposing the gendered burden of writing instruction. Their transparency confirmed as nothing else had

that my problem was not personal but systemic. The admission of professional fallibility from seemingly invincible "household name" academics was the only thing that had resonated as I struggled to make sense of it all and break out of the rut I'd fallen into. And if I'd felt this rudderless as an established senior academic, I wondered how similar feelings of inadequacy might be amplified in female tutors lacking such seniority and job security but bearing similar emotional labour burdens.

In *Any Ordinary Day* (2018), Australian journalist Leigh Sales demonstrates the extent of human aversion to the unexpected and our often-palpable fear of the unknown through interviews with well-known Australian trauma survivors. Through statistical data and autoethnographic accounts of resilience, Sales documents our uneasiness with the unknown, citing scientific experiments that demonstrate the brain's preference for predictability over uncertainty:

> In one study, monkeys were given a choice between two colored targets, both of which came with rewards but only one of which gave advance information about what that reward would be. After a few days, the monkeys showed a clear preference for the target that gave information about the future. In another experiment, human subjects were found to prefer receiving a guaranteed electric shock over sitting with the uncertainty that they might or might not get a shock. In other words, people feel better about knowing what is coming – even if it is painful – than not knowing. It's easier to prepare ourselves when we know what's in store, whether good or bad. There is thus a biological bias to the cliché 'forewarned is forearmed' (p. 28).

In January 2020, aiming to produce a resource to forearm newcomers to our field, I embarked on a book project similar to Sales's, in which I interviewed 65 senior writing studies academics from all over the world (approximately half male and half female from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds) about the worst days of their professional lives and how they found the resilience to stay the course. In one-hour semi-structured interviews, I asked each participant the following questions:

1. What attracted you to a career in Writing Studies, or why did you choose this field?
2. How long have you taught writing, and what is your current title/role?
3. Were you formally trained to teach writing in graduate school or was this work something you came to later in your career?
4. How many institutions have you worked in? If more than one, why did you change institutions?
5. How would you characterise the culture of higher education today? What changes have you noticed in this culture over your career and how has it impacted your work?
6. In general, has the reality of your work matched your expectations of the work you would be doing? Please explain your answer.

7. What have you changed your mind about as a result of experience?
8. Can you give an example (or two) of something completely unexpected that has arisen in your career – and how you dealt with it?
9. If there were one thing you could change in your career, what would that be?
10. What advice would you give to new academics in training? Or, in other words, what advice would senior you give to junior you?

Responses were as individual as the interviewees and covered a range of issues. And while the work had not begun as a feminist study, a major theme around gender bias and discrimination coalesced quickly from the accounts of both male and female participants. While all interviewees reported common challenges such as securing funding for programs, writing centres, writing-based projects and the endless struggle to have writing recognised as a valid discipline on equal footing with others, I was struck by the range of additional challenges experienced by female interviewees and witnessed by male interviewees:

- Sexual harassment (verbal and physical)
- Discrimination based on parental status (mothers can't possibly be good academics or administrators, childless academics have no idea, etc.)
- Blatant gender bias, particularly in recruitment and promotion processes and applications for leadership roles
- Bullying by male peers, supervisors, and students
- Being ignored, talked over, or denied the right to speak in meetings and/or being expected to take notes or serve refreshments
- Not being taken seriously as a scholar, colleague, or administrator
- Having decisions overridden by male colleagues and superiors
- Pay inequities
- Unsolicited critiques of attire, hairstyles, and general "attitude"
- Undermining of leadership by male colleagues and students
- Misappropriation of intellectual property by male supervisors and colleagues
- Being held to stricter expectations and standards and generally given less leeway than male peers

The most reprehensible accounts (unsurprisingly) came from women of colour and LGBTQI+ colleagues who contend daily with the double whammy of systemic sexism *and* racism/homophobia. These narratives, some from colleagues with five decades in academe, indicate a long, problematic history of systemic gender discrimination in the academy. It had been all too easy to assume that prominent female scholars got where they are by not putting a foot wrong and possessing seemingly superhuman powers of intuition and discretion; however, their stories reveal that they navigated uncertainties through developing greater awareness of systemic bias and discrimination, learning from their mistakes and misapprehensions, forming activist networks, documenting everything and seeking out good mentors. The ongoing transformative effects of my conversations with these women suggest that the taboos surrounding autoethnography and storytelling as valid

research methods (Sparkes, 2000, Atkinson, 1997, Coffey, 1999) must be lifted, allowing such expertise to feature more explicitly in our research, pedagogy and the guidance we offer new colleagues. As Boylorn and Orbe (2016) argue, such stories:

> welcome readers into these experiences, encourage us to interrogate and compare our own perceptions, and reveal the challenges and opportunities we face in negotiating our worldviews with the understandings of others in our communities. These stories compel us as readers and participants in the diverse world in which we live to think with open hearts and open minds about our commonality within the human experience. (p. 10)

To underscore the value of storytelling in our work, I offer five excerpts from my interviews that illustrate systemic gender bias and discrimination in higher education as manifested in the classroom, professional exchanges with colleagues, the writing centre and departmental meetings.

Scenario 1: Classroom

On the first day of semester at a large public university, a female coordinator received an email from an "unflappable" female tutor experiencing unusual behaviour from a male student in her class. After apologising for "bringing an issue" to the coordinator so early in the semester, the tutor described the student's disruptive behaviour in detail:

> [Male student's name] in my [X] class did everything he could to undermine me and disrupt the class. He persistently asked questions designed to derail the class, including demanding I cover areas of the course I explained would be taught in later weeks and attempting to argue with me over late penalties and other aspects of the course. In the first week of each class I always lay out expectations including lateness, attendance and mobile phone use. This semester I also asked people to see me with questions in the break and not at the end of the class as I have back-to-back lessons. He proceeded to pull out his phone and then refused to put it away when asked repeatedly (he actually said 'no' when I asked him, the third time, if he would put it away). I asked that if he could not comply with this request that he leave the classroom as it was disrupting the lesson. He left. He then returned at the end of the lesson and proceeded to stay in the classroom to prevent me from taking the break between classes. While occupying the room during the break he took it upon himself to continue his poor behaviour. One particularly galling example was that I had explained I pronounce my name [XX] way and let them know they could call me [name of tutor] if that was easier, so he took it upon himself to ask me to pronounce my name repeatedly and then tried to have an argument over the pronunciation.

The tutor went on to express worry about future disruptions and concerns for her own and other students's safety in the classroom. But most importantly, she indicated being "at a loss as how to approach this", having never experienced such a situation over several years of successful teaching. She apologised again for "bringing problems to [the coordinator]". The coordinator replied immediately, assuring the tutor she had nothing to apologise for. They discussed a range of options, including the coordinator accompanying the tutor to the next class. Determined to manage the situation on her own, the tutor declined the offer but requested that the coordinator issue the student a written directive. The coordinator emailed the student, expressing her disappointment in the situation and inviting him to contact her to discuss any problems. The coordinator attached the student code of conduct, highlighting relevant clauses about respecting fellow students and teaching staff. She heard nothing from the student but received another worrying report from the tutor after the following week's class:

> [Male student's] behavior continues to be problematic; however, it has become more borderline since your email last week. He seems to be attempting to figure out how disruptive he can be without overtly contravening the code of conduct. Personally, I feel he is trying to bully me by undermining my authority and being as disruptive as possible. He is not getting a reaction and the rest of the class is clearly unimpressed and embarrassed by his antics.
>
> By mostly ignoring him – save when he is openly and vocally defying me – he did seem to run out of steam. I am still finding it very hard and it is definitely affecting my confidence.

At this stage, the coordinator was primarily concerned for the mental wellbeing of the tutor as well as the additional (uncompensated) labour this situation was creating. As an immediate solution, as well as to test her gender bias suspicions, the coordinator moved the problematic student into a tutorial facilitated by a male tutor of similar age and experience. She contacted the male tutor after his first class with the student to check how things had gone. Bracing for the worst, she was both relieved and angered by his reply:

> Yes, [male student's name] attended my class this morning. He was on-time, polite and actively participated in the group work. To be honest, he was a model student it seemed. It's been pleasantly surprising.

The male tutor was extremely supportive of the female tutor and coordinator, offering to observe the male student carefully for any worrying interactions with female students in his tutorial. He also expressed regret at the extra work this has caused for female colleagues, indicating that it had opened his eyes anew to the unlevel playing field for male and female academics and compelled him to be more active in identifying and negotiating gender bias in the classroom.

Scenario 2: (Male) student complaint about female tutor lodged with (male) Chair of Department

This interviewee, also a female casual academic working in a large public university, shared a similar situation that arose when a male student lodged a complaint about her with the (male) Chair of Department. Several weeks after final grades had been submitted, the (female) tutor's coordinator received an email from a male student with the vague subject line "a former student's reflection on the teaching and learning experience". After describing everything from the female tutor's clothing, piercings, supposed age and "body language" to her private conversations with other students, which he had allegedly overheard, he proceeded to critique her "bad attitude" and "lack of professionalism" in CC'ing the coordinator on a stream of emails. He claimed this was "psychologically damaging" since the tutor was sharing details of his behaviour with a "third party" and thus "violating his privacy". He then quoted the dollar amount he had spent on the unit of study as justification that he "deserved to pass", in a thinly veiled attempt to blackmail the coordinator emotionally.

The coordinator replied to the student, indicating that the tutor had been following her instructions to CC the coordinator on detailed or complex conversations with students, as casuals are not paid for such labour, which must be escalated to the coordinator. The coordinator then requested clarification on the purpose of the student's email: what did he expect to happen as a result of his "reflection", and why had he not come to her with his concerns during the semester when she could have intervened? She received no reply. A week later, the coordinator received a phone call from the female tutor who was now distressed by a terse email she'd received from the (male) Chair of Department notifying her of an official complaint lodged against her by a student on grounds of "inappropriate attitude" and "unprofessional behaviour". The Chair's email seemed unnecessarily stern and condescending, particularly when compared with the tone used when discussing similar situations with male coordinators and tutors (exchanges the coordinator had been privy to). The coordinator contacted the Chair of Department and shared the relevant email chain. He was apologetic, indicating that the student had failed to mention previous correspondence with the tutor and coordinator. However, the coordinator remained troubled by the Chair's automatic assumption that the student's complaint was legitimate and the tutor was at fault. Also disappointing was the Chair's choice to reprimand the tutor rather than deferring judgment until after hearing her side of the story. Understandably the tutor felt attacked from all sides and the coordinator couldn't help but wonder what the Chair's response might have been if it were a female student lodging a complaint about a male tutor.

Scenario 3: Writing centre

Another interviewee, an experienced female tutor working in the writing centre of a large public institution, recalled her encounter with a belligerent male student seeking "help" understanding his (male) instructor's feedback on a failed assignment. The tutor patiently attempted to guide the student through the feedback in keeping with the methods she had

learnt in the tutor training program. She referred the student to the relevant department's grading criteria and asked the student how his own evaluation of his work compared with the marker's. However, instead of engaging with the tutor, the student became increasingly agitated and verbally abusive, raising his voice, standing over the tutor, and repeating "you don't understand what I'm saying either!" When the tutor politely asked him to calm down (and sit down), he accused her of having a bad attitude and pointing out his faults rather than offering assistance. He then approached the (female) administrative assistant on duty, requesting an appointment with "a tutor who knows what he's doing". When the administrative assistant requested clarification, the student replied bluntly, "I want a male tutor". When the female tutor approached the (female) Writing Centre Director for help, the Director emailed the student, advising him of the tutor's complaint and attaching the University Code of Conduct.

The Director reminded the student that writing centre tutors are members of staff and should be treated with the same courtesy and respect as any other staff member. She added that taking advantage of writing centre services is a privilege, not a right, and basic courtesy is expected of all students and staff.

The student replied, apologised for raising his voice, but firmly maintained that the tutor had displayed "a bad attitude" and "lack of respect". He then asserted his "right" to "write down [his] feedback". The Director responded, thanking him for his reply and inviting more detailed feedback but received no further communication from him. However, a student using similar vocabulary and punctuation conventions wrote a lengthy comment on a student feedback survey, calling the tutor by name and complaining about her abusive behaviour.

Scenarios 4 and 5: Gender dynamics in departmental meetings

Here, I have paired findings from two separate interviews to illustrate a pattern. One offers a firsthand account of a senior female academic being silenced and "mansplained" in a departmental meeting while the other offers an account of a similar event at another university, recounted by a junior male academic.

A senior female academic and world-renowned scholar at a large public institution recounted being bullied and harassed by a senior male departmental colleague across a number of public contexts:

> He tried to bully me by saying awful things about me in front of an audience in my presence. When we were co-writing stuff, he'd write comments on my stuff that were awful. Cleary he didn't like me and was jealous of me. My dog died and I had had it. So at our next meeting, I pointed my finger at him and said, 'YOU MAY NEVER SPEAK TO ME LIKE THAT AGAIN'. From then on, he'd say things like 'Well, I'd say something but [you] will get mad at me'.

The senior female academic then discussed the issue with other female departmental colleagues and learned that other males in the department were exhibiting similar public shaming behaviours towards women, including colleagues, graduate students and interviewees for advertised academic positions. Not only were they bullying their female colleagues but were condoning bullying they witnessed by male colleagues and students in meetings, classrooms and other public settings. The women banded together and reported the issue to the Dean. When the bullies were confronted, they became hostile, yelling and slamming doors. They accused their female colleagues of harassment and published essays about their own "mistreatment", never acknowledging the mistreatment they'd inflicted on others – or witnessed without reporting it.

In the companion scenario, a mid-career male writing Program Director recounts witnessing similar bullying behaviour in an English Department meeting he was chairing at a community college. The Director had invited a young female staff member in information and communication technology (ICT) to give an overview of a new virtual helpdesk to assist academics in technological troubleshooting. The ICT expert also held an advanced English degree and was a casual tutor in the English Department. Despite her demonstrated expertise in both technology and English, an older senior male academic kept interrupting her presentation by aggressively questioning every point she made. When she would try to answer, he'd cut her off again and proceed to talk over her, implying that he knew more than she did, despite his obvious lack of ICT expertise.

The interviewee recalls:

> I was caught between wanting to say something and being patriarchal by acting as though [the presenter] needed a guy to stand up for her. So I was just kind of frozen and it took me a really long time to say anything and then when I did I just kind of changed the subject. I got a couple of emails that night from some other women in the writing program who said 'I'm really disappointed in you. You let him bully her and you didn't say anything until, you know, a long time into it'. And they were totally right. But I was conflicted from a gender standpoint. I was conflicted from a professional standpoint. It was a meeting environment and what I think I forgot was the overall guidance needs to be about human decency and just taking care of people – not in an icky gendered way, but as the meeting chair I've got to make sure that the conversation is respectful and professional.

These four scenarios, along with my firsthand experience of systemic bias and discrimination in over 25 years in higher education, have prompted me to rethink how we prepare female tutors for writing classrooms and writing centre work – and how we educate all academics, from graduate students to distinguished professors, to be more aware of and responsive to sexism and other forms of discrimination in the classroom and other professional settings. While we've grown adept at representing the intellectual work of the

job and providing "hands-on" mentoring with experienced tutors, we are less thorough in addressing the emotional labour inherent in the job.

In her stirring foreword to *The Things We Carry: Strategies for Recognizing and Negotiating Emotional Labour in Writing Program Administration* (2020), Laura Micciche argues for specific modules on resilience and self-care to be offered alongside more traditional tutor training methods. Drawing on firsthand experience after a series of disruptive encounters with a male student in her feminist writing class, Micciche makes a compelling case for the dangers of rationalising or ignoring gender discrimination in the classroom:

> Had I read *The Things We Carry: Strategies for Recognizing and Negotiating Emotional Labour in Writing Program Administration* sooner, I might have done a better job addressing peer-to-peer gender-based harassment when it surfaced in my graduate seminar in fall 2018. For starters, I would have recognized my student's behavior for what it was – deliberate, repeated acts of intimidation directed against women – instead of explaining it to myself as familiar peacocking by a jerky student. Maybe, if I'd acted sooner, worse behaviors (offensive sexually oriented comments on and off campus, inappropriate touching, raging at a female student in another class) could have been thwarted. (p. x)

Stories like Micciche's are not uncommon. Growing cultures of change management (Donoghue, 2018), faculty incivility (Kotter, 2012), mental health challenges (Gorczynski, 2017) and bullying (Twale, 2017; Elder & Davila, 2019) in higher education have prompted a rethinking of how we prepare new academics for the emotional demands of the job. The creation of a self-care stream and various mentoring initiatives at the annual American Council of Writing Program Administrators Conference and the growing CWPA [Post]Graduate Organization underscore what veterans of the field have known for some time: despite practical know-how and theoretical facility, even the most tenacious writing instructors can wobble under sustained pressure, often to the point where their work, health and self-esteem suffer (Elder & Davila, 2019; Enos & Borrowman, 2008). This rings particularly true in Australian universities, where writing instruction – academic, creative and professional – can occur on the margins, perceived as ancillary to the "real business" of departments and programs (Percy, 2019). Unlike teaching roles in more established, less subjective disciplines, the very nature of teaching writing is personal, as it involves helping students see the possibilities (and shortcomings) in what amounts to an extension of themselves. Too often, when offered carelessly or hastily, feedback on student writing can be read as a criticism of the student rather than their writing, which can generate animosity towards the tutor.

This might explain why "attitude" often surfaces as a complaint about female academics: women are stereotyped as subservient, maternal and accommodating. Usually lacking the authority of more established female academics, female tutors are particularly vulnerable

to such discrimination, which manifests most strongly in student evaluations of teaching (SET).

Mitchell and Martin (2018) contend, based on a series of SET studies, that women are evaluated differently in the classroom in at least two ways: intelligence/competence and personality. Furthermore, they cite Bennett's (1982) findings that students expect women to offer more interpersonal support than male instructors. In addition to being described as "warm" they note that women have been stereotyped as needing to exhibit nurturing and sensitive attitudes (like kindness and sympathy) to other people, citing Heilman and Okimoto (2007). Mitchell and Martin offer the following excerpt from a student email to an online female instructor:

> I want you personally to know I have hated every day in your course, and if I wasn't forced to take this, I never would have. Anytime you mention this course to anyone who has ever taken it, they automatically know that you are a horrific teacher, and that they will hate every day in your class. Be a human being show some sympathy everyone hates this class and the material so be realistic and work with people. (2018, p. 1)

They conclude that women are evaluated on different criteria than men and that men receive higher evaluations in identical courses, even for questions unrelated to the individual instructor's ability, demeanour or attitude (p. 5).

Senior female academics – while not immune to bias and discrimination – have unfortunately learned to anticipate these challenges, aided not only by experience and hindsight but a seeming "third eye" of emotional intelligence, honed through weathering hard times, butting glass ceilings and facing the status quo head-on. They realise that such emotional labour continues to be a necessary, though unremunerated (and often unacknowledged) requirement of their work. However, their stories are not as readily available to tutors as other professional development resources, since few personal accounts are publicly available. For this reason, storytelling and autoethnography become important methods for documenting, exploring and sharing the challenges posed by gender discrimination for emotional wellbeing and career advancement. Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) define autoethnography as:

> An approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience. This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product. (p. 1)

Adams, Jones and Ellis (2015) add that autoethnography "shows people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles" (p.2).

Storytelling, on the other hand, sees the story as the product of the enquiry and invites the reader *into* the story to engage at both emotional and rational levels with the narrator's experience (Frank, 2000). The researcher-as-storyteller understands the story itself as containing analytical techniques, theory and dialogical structures (Bleakley, 2005; Ellis, 2004) which can speak for themselves:

> In a narrative analysis, storytellers emphasize that participants' stories of the self are told for the sake of others just as much as for themselves. Hence, the ethical and heartfelt claim is for a dialogic relationship with a listener … that requires engagement from within, not analysis from outside, the story and narrative identity. Consequently, the goal and responsibility is to evoke and bear witness to a situation … inviting the reader into a relationship, enticing people to think and feel *with* the story being told as opposed to thinking *about* it. (Smith & Sparkes 2006, p. 185)

Indebted to the wise counsel of experienced colleagues in the aftermath of institutional upheaval, I have contemplated how a more explicit emphasis on storytelling in tutor preparation can help forewarn and forearm women for potential problems. In my case, such "intel" might have rounded out my otherwise excellent theoretical and practical training with the emotional preparation I would need to confront the unexpected. In revisiting accepted definitions, expectations and assumptions of teaching writing, I have considered how the shared stories of established female academics's experiences of confronting gender discrimination and their strategies for self-care can better equip female tutors for the emotional labour of the job – the part that the literature does not and cannot address – since theoretical accounts are no substitute for lived experience.

Paying attention to the informal also assists in developing habits of cognitive reframing which is vital in the aftermath of particularly traumatic and demoralising situations. According to Beck (1997), reframing is "a psychological technique that consists of identifying and then disputing irrational or maladaptive thoughts … a way of viewing and experiencing events, ideas, concepts and emotions to find more positive alternatives". Similarly, in "The Cognitive Control of Emotion" (2005), Ochsner and Gross make a case for controlling attention to, and cognitively changing the meaning of, emotionally evocative stimuli to regulate emotional responses. In turbulent situations, such techniques can assist writing tutors in making objective, evidence-based assessments and preparing detached, well-reasoned responses rather than succumbing to knee jerk emotional reactions and taking things personally. Reframing can also help women avoid what is often referred to as the "double bind" or "assertiveness penalty" (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008). According to Brescoll and Uhlmann, when women exhibit stereotypically masculine traits commonly

associated with leadership, like assertiveness, they are less liked than men exhibiting the same traits:

> Men received a boost in their perceived status after expressing anger. In contrast, women who expressed anger were consistently accorded lower status and lower wages and were seen as less competent. Because likability can be an even more important factor than competence for getting hired, women who breach gender stereotypes may jeopardise their career prospects. (2008, p. 273)

Perhaps Richard Buchanan (2009) says it best in arguing for a sharper focus on human dignity, which can be applied directly to the professional development of writing instructors:

> Human-centred design is fundamentally an affirmation of human dignity. It is an ongoing search for what can be done to support and strengthen the dignity of human beings as they act out their lives in a variety of social, economic, political, and cultural circumstances. (p. 415)

If there is one thing that unites us as writers and writing instructors, it is this affirmation of human dignity, which manifests in our ongoing efforts to support others and leave the discipline a little better than we found it. Through sharing our stories, we can shed light on the emotional labour that unfolds in the contested spaces of writing instruction and make a collective commitment to documenting and bearing witness to the unexpected and unknown. As Kelly Ritter (2018) argues, we need to find new ways of sharing our expertise across institutions to increase both its meaningfulness and usefulness. More focus on the emotional demands of writing instruction and systemic gender bias seems a good starting place. By documenting our narratives of lived experience, as well as personal strategies for survival in a kaleidoscopic educational landscape, we can devise a living collage of insights and strategies for navigating the unexpected. Doing so will allow us to offer collective insight, foresight and hindsight to new female colleagues, helping them feel a little less alone, a little less uncertain and a little less vulnerable when difficulties arise. And if there is one constant in teaching writing (and in academe as a whole), it is that things will go wrong. What defines us is how we respond – and how we prepare others to respond.

Notes

Navigating the Unexpected: Writing Programs in Times of Change is forthcoming in 2022 in the *Perspectives on Writing Series* of the University Press of Colorado. Interview extracts included here were taken from this study (Human Ethics clearance number 2020/075).

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