# Disenfranchised Workers: A view from within the Public Service

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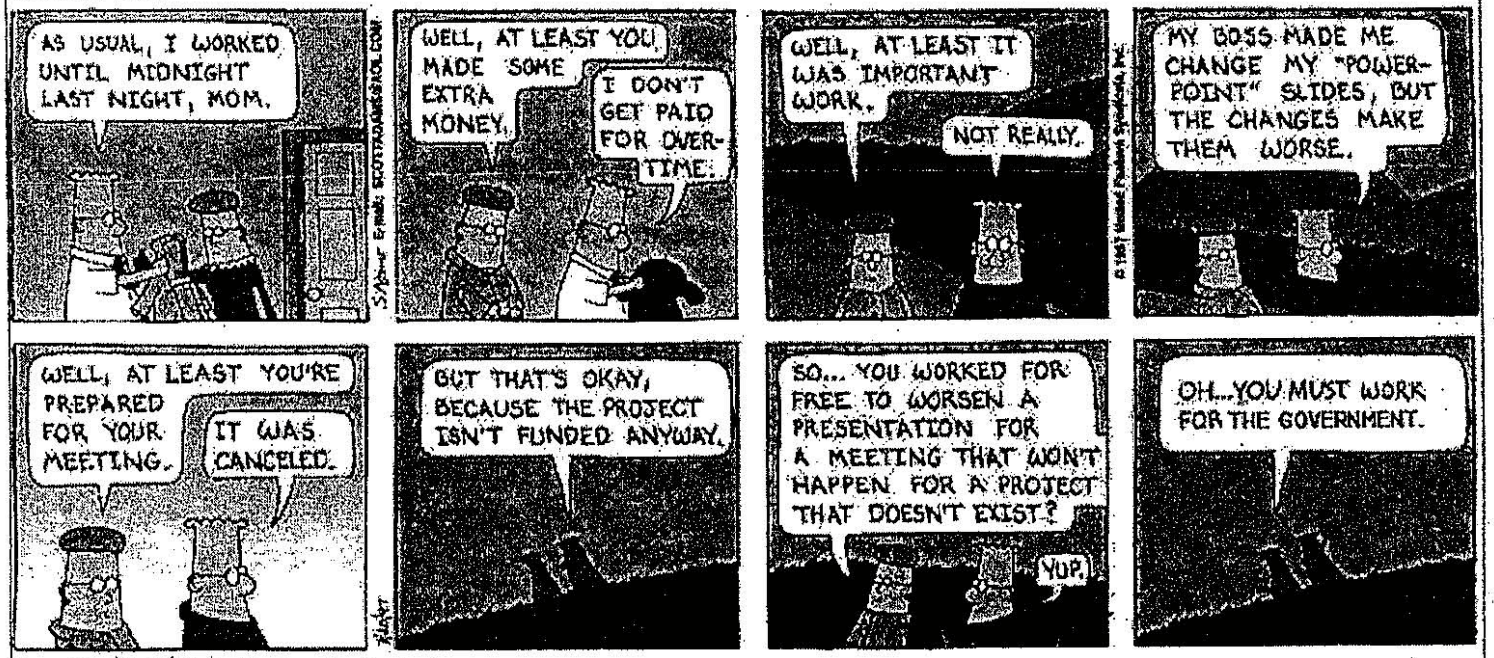
Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctorate of Philosophy in Education by Thesis at Victoria University.

**November, 2011**

**DILBERT** **BY SCOTT ADAMS**

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## Doctor of Philosophy Declaration

"I, Tanya Paterson, declare that the PhD thesis entitled: *Disenfranchised Workers: A view from within the Public Service,* is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work".

--- ---

Signature Date

# Dedication

To J – for the seed.

# Acknowledgments

**The Participants**

To all my participants who shared their lives with me. Through their stories I could write my PHD and through my study their voices could be heard. For their bravery, their suffering and mistreatment. I feel for their plight and appreciate the retelling of their stories, sometimes reliving their suffering to shine a light on the mistreatment of public servants throughout the service.

**Supervisor**

Professor Maureen Ryan – Victoria University

For all your encouragement, sage words and patience. What a journey. I thought it would never end but you always kept the faith.

**Friends and Family**

Like disenfranchisement a PHD can be a burden on family and friends. I acknowledge their support and forgive them for rolling their eyes at the very mention of public servants and all their issues. I think when I left the public service they were relieved there would be no more boring public service stories but alas my whole new life was involved with the retelling of stories of other disenfranchised public servants.

Many people read chapters for me. I appreciate their time and expertise.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Georgia Clarkson | Shaunagh Darroch | Sarah Tartakover |
| Sue Eastcote | Jodie Limon | Elizabeth Thyer |

**To all those who have hated their job.**

**Hated their boss. Hated their life.**

**Lost your optimism. Lost your zest.**

**You are not alone.**

# Abstract

This research examines the experiences of disenfranchised workers in the Australian Public Service.

The best methodology for my study is a hybrid. A hybrid that takes the wisdom of ethnographic case studies, phenomenology, feminist post-structuralism and narrative theories to make sense of the stories of people working within organisations that have failed, traumatised, belittled, ignored, bullied and destroyed them.

The study looks at the experiences of twenty disenfranchised workers who labelled themselves as disenfranchised.

This thesis is about the abused, the mistreated, and the disenfranchised. Of opportunities lost and perceived injustices. I believe the voices of the disenfranchised public servants are silenced by supervisors, colleagues and the system itself. This study aims to give legitimacy to their complaints, document their stories and chronicle their mistreatment at the hands of public supervisors who are often brutalised themselves. The Public Service workplace becomes like a violent family. We all learn what we see, not what we read or are told. And so the culture of dysfunction is passed from underling to boss and workers suffer. These actions ripple throughout public servants' lives.

Literature around the disenfranchised worker is growing. This study documents the experiences of disenfranchised workers and unmutes their voices. These experiences are important and contemporary issues to enable people to live a life of consequence.

# Chapter One - Introduction

This study is firmly based in the real world of unhappy, abused and disgruntled public servants. This study is about people suffering in their public service jobs. This is not a love story. I am sure there are happy public servants but this is not a study about them.

This study is about the abused, the mistreated, and the disenfranchised. Of opportunities lost and perceived injustices. I believe the voices of the disenfranchised public servants are silenced by supervisors, colleagues and the system itself. Disenfranchised public servants are 'others'.[1] 'Others' are people who are not part of the dominant paradigm. Their experiences and stories are marginalised and do not form the dominant discourse (Krumer-Nevo, 2002). This study aims to give voice to these 'others'. It aims to scream and shout and rant for these 'others'. This study aims to give legitimacy to the disenfranchised public servants' complaints, document their stories and chronicle their mistreatment at the hands of supervisors who are often brutalised themselves. The public service workplace becomes like a domestic violent family. We often learn what we see, not what we read or are told. And so the culture of dysfunction is passed from boss to underling and workers suffer. These actions ripple throughout public servants' lives. The costs are high not only for workers, but for their families and friends and the public they are supposed to serve.

The writing style of this study may be considered unconventional. However there has been a shift away from writing that distances the writer from the text (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002). In this study the researcher is in the text, with the text and immersed in the text.

[1] Othering is the mechanism of creating splits between groups, between us' an 'them'. This mechanism is a symbolic cultural code for the distinction between human categories that forms the basis of social order. 'We' are perceived, in this mechanism, as possessing good and positive qualities while 'they', the Others, are the owners of negative qualities. As such, Othering is used mainly against those in the margins of society (Krumer-Nevo, 2002).

## Contribution to knowledge

Workers' views are frequently missing in discussions of the contemporary workplace and yet the importance of these words and their meaning within the context of the organisation is unquestionable. Workers need to tell their stories in their words because it is their reality that gives meaning to behaviours and attitudes (Hodson, 2001). This examination of twenty disenfranchised public servants' perceptions allowed these voices to be heard and in doing so it highlights the experience of disenfranchisement in the public service. Disenfranchised voices are often silenced due to the culture within the public service that inadequately provides an avenue for workers' issues to be examined and acknowledged.

## Question

The question to be answered in this study is:

***'What are the experiences of public servants who have been disenfranchised in their workplaces'?***

Here is the story of twenty individuals who suffered in their public service jobs in Australia in the 21st century. **Abandon hope all who enter.**

My participants were extroverts and introverts, loud people and quiet people, reserved people and pushy people suggesting disenfranchisement can happen to anyone.

## Definitions of terms

## Public Service

All participants in this study worked for the public service in a range of departments. Australia's public services cover the three levels of government: Federal or Commonwealth; state and territory; and local government. Around 15 per cent of the Australian workforce is employed in public services. Most public servants are employed by state governments. The state government workforce is the largest at around 73 per cent of the total.

All levels of government are hierarchical and have distinct responsibilities. These responsibilities are divided up between departments or agencies and statutory bodies. The way these responsibilities are divided up is determined by the elected government of the day. In broad terms, public servants are responsible for assisting the Government to carry out its functions, which include preparing policy advice to Ministers, implementing policy decisions, drafting legislation and managing contracts to ensure the delivery of government programs. A range of awards and unions cover public service workers. The common union is the Public Service Association (PSA).

## Pay grade

Pay grade is the level of remuneration that public servants receive. The levels range from Grade one/two to Grade 11/12. After this, individuals go into the State Executive Services which is contract based. For this study teachers and nurses were not included because it was my aim to reach what people would consider as 'traditional' public servants. People who work in offices or provide services to the public. Teachers and nurses work in a different bureaucratic environment. I am sure there is another PHD possible into the disenfranchisement of teachers and nurses.

Sharon's words introduce us to the world of the public servants involved in this study.

> Every government department seems really f..ked. If you're incompetent, you seem to get promoted above your capability. Why is that? How does that happen? I don't understand that?
>
> And then you have competent reliable people in the organisation and you just get treated like s..t. How does this happen..
>
> What I do care about is they say I can't do my job properly.
>
> I'm doing my job properly.
>
> I know every policy and procedure and to cover up their mismanagement, their incompetence, they treat me badly and put me down.
>
> I was completely devastated; it was the darkest days of my life.

Echoes of mistreatment can affect past, present and future.

After being called a lying lesbian, malingerer, after years of battling with her public service unit, Sharon was sent a letter of 'appreciation' thanking her for her professionalism and tenacity.

> Dear Ms G
>
> Thank you for your professionalism in reporting the misconduct of your fellow officers.
>
> It was through your tenacity that we have been able to successfully investigate the list of your complaints.
>
> The guilty officer has been stood down pending legal actions.
>
> Regards
>
> HR Management.

This twenty word letter took six years. Well I suppose there is hope for the other nineteen disenfranchised public servants in my study. It is also interesting to note that no name was given to the letter. HR Management is a faceless and imposing bureaucratic edifice. No one person was held responsible and no real person gave the apology. Cold comfort for the participant who suffered at the hands of her public service organisation.

Work does not happen in a vacuum. It is only the luckiest people who come to work with a stable and loving home environment, no substance abuse problems, no mental health issues. Many workers have relationship and financial problems, drug-addicted children, ageing parents and the myriad of issues and problems that come with living in a complicated world.

From the experiences of disenfranchised workers in this study it seems the Australian Public Service holds a delusional view of itself. In the Federal Government's most recent review of the Australian Public Service, *Ahead of the Game*, (29th March 2010) the public service claimed to look for the best and boldest thinkers that they could produce and recruit (page iii). This is a far cry from the public service of my participants.

When public service managers, including a Director of Community Services, a Director of a small Public Service agency and a Manager of Communication in a large public service unit, offered to read drafts of this study they often came to it expecting to see bleeding hearts. Incompetent people making excuses for their lack of ability. All of them came back with much sympathy for the participants. To my surprise, to their surprise. I hope the reader feels such sympathy and empathy, because it would be unfortunate if mistreatment at work is universal. Many people have been mismanaged or know someone who has suffered at work. That is why in the striving for a just and compassionate society detailed research and analysis of the experiences of disenfranchised workers needs to be undertaken.

This is a qualitative research study. It is a study of disenfranchised public servants undertaken by a disenfranchised public servant. The best methodology for making sense of my study is a hybrid. A hybrid that takes the wisdom of ethnographic case studies, phenomenology, feminist post-structuralism and narrative theories to make sense of the stories of people working within organisations that have failed, traumatised, belittled, ignored, bullied and destroyed them.

The data for the study were gathered through interviewing twenty public servants who labelled themselves as disenfranchised. A purposive sampling technique was used to identify participants through established public service networks (Gilbert, 1993). Five individuals were identified and then a snowballing technique was used. Due to the snowballing effect the researcher had access to many hundreds of people who wanted to tell their stories of disenfranchisement.

The chapter *The Contest for Credibility* is a discussion of validity in qualitative research. The validity of a disenfranchised public servant researching disenfranchised public servants, the validity of the participants' voices, the validity of the analysis and the validity of the topic itself.

The *Nature of Work– The Nature of Workers* explores the importance of work to us as individuals. Work often defines who we are. The chapter looks at the repercussions of working in an abusive organisation. It also discusses the idea that Human Resource departments have sometimes become instruments of disenfranchisement.

*The Personality of Tyranny – Bullying, Ostracism and Incivilities* looks at the types of behaviours that happen in the public service. Bullying is of course still an issue but poor public service behaviour is often more subtle and insidious than bullying. This chapter also looks at the sicknesses and maladies of bureaucracies, and the way this sickness can affect workers' lives.

The *Scourge of Professionalism – Unpacking the professional facade that leads to disenfranchisement* looks at the crimes committed in the name of professionalism. This

chapter highlights the differences between professionalism, human compassion and kindness. It highlights the cruelty of managers who do not put people first.

Restructuring within the public service is explored in the chapter *Saving Money, Losing Souls.*

The chapter on *Thwarted Potential* looks at the repercussions when you do not give people the opportunity to shine at work. The outcome is thwarted potential, disenfranchisement and suffering.

*More than Just Bad Behaviour – Seriously unacceptable behaviour in the public service* is about the extraordinary behaviours that occur in public service organisations. It is extreme behaviour but not extraordinary, in the sense of uncommon or rare. The data comes from my participant's stories and the popular press. It involves sexual harassment in the extreme, gender harassment and sexual misconduct. It is hard to believe that such a hotbed of inappropriate, illegal and nasty behaviour occurs in our public institutions.

The next chapter examines pain and toxicity in the public service. The emphasis of this chapter is how to deal with the inevitable pain that organisations cause in a manner that heals rather than hurts. When toxins are handled in a healing way in the workplace then workers' lives can be remarkably improved. Workers can gain a zest for work.

After the conclusion there is a postscript that looks at where the interviewed public servants are now. In the excerpts of the participants' interviews my utterances are in blue.

## The Participants

To understand the experiences of my participants and to allow readers the opportunity to know my participants I have constructed vignettes of each public servant interviewed for this study. As the study unfolds you will get to know the participants. Of course any vignette written by me is subjective, as I see and hear and react to the participants with all their masks in place.

I am more than appreciative of how honest and forthright the participants were. Telling me very personal information about themselves, from their drug-addicted family members, to their own addictions and their mental health issues. I have been privy to psychiatric reports, Work Cover[2] documents and Work Quest[3] evaluations. I feel very intimate with my participants. Following the initial interview, I then listened and re-listened to their stories as part of the transcribing process. Later I read and reread their stories as I analysed and deconstructed their stories. Whenever I got stuck for words I returned to the stories; they were inspirational, depressing, infuriating; a wealth of knowledge about the world of the disenfranchised public servant.

My participant introductions are deeply subjective. Of course their stories were told through their eyes. We can only look through our own eyes. Maybe we all have delusional ideas about our abilities and entitlements. My participants were not faking their pain and distress. They had nothing to gain by fabrications.

---

[2]WorkCover is a government agency which administers work health and safety, injury management, return to work and workers' compensation laws and manages the workers' compensation system.

[3]WorkQuest is an agency hired by government to provide evaluations of people's ability to return to work after an injury.

My participants are vastly different as most humans are. The stereotype of the mousey, quiet, boring public servant was not the character of the people telling me their stories. They were deemed to be too loud or too quiet; too young or too old; too experienced or not experienced enough; knew too much or knew too little; were too keen or not keen enough; too enthusiastic, or not enthusiastic enough; too passionate, too smart or too ambitious for their public service workplaces.

Really there were few commonalities in my participants except they have had terrible times at work. When reading my participants' stories throughout the study you might think that all my participants were hopeless or incompetent workers with performance issues. They did not start their public service careers that way. Many were high achievers who 'cared too much.' Frequently performance issues came with disenfranchisement.

It is hard to capture the essence of people through words. But this is what I have attempted. Work does not happen in a vacuum. What happens at home affects our work and what happens at work affects our home.

I introduce you to the participants: the disenfranchised public servants. Names used throughout the study are pseudonyms, and several identifying details of participants have been modified.

## Abby

*Just a skinny chick doing a job men have been doing for a million years.*

Abby worked in a male dominated public service area. Her public service workplace was full of sexist men who were threatened by her very existence. She was the only woman in her workplace. Not in an office but out in the field. In a uniform. So unwelcomed. Made to feel miserable. Too keen and too competent. Working in a public service workplace antagonistic toward women.

Abby is a ‘can do’ sort of person. A person you would want around in an emergency. Good at her job. Serious and ambitious. Most likely to succeed. However her working life was hell. Full of incivilities. Maybe a one-off event would be nothing to worry about but the continuing destabilising, diminishing and dismissive behaviours were more than a person could bear.

> My lunch would get stolen. Someone would eat it. Someone would always delete my computer files on the computer system.
>
> I set up a newsletter. It was for stupid stuff like recipes and bios. And I put them in everyone’s pigeon hole and then someone ripped them up and put them in my pigeon hole.

And when she dared complain to her public service supervisor about the ostracism, the rudeness and the incivilities, he said:

> Oh yes, the culture has to change.

And it did not and Abby left. What a loss to the general public.

## Alex

Alex’s story is one of nepotism, redundancies and dysfunctional bureaucracy. No-one works in this public service agency without someone on the inside. Everyone is someone’s son or daughter, mother or father, uncle or aunty. Despite public service recruitment policies and procedures there are still places where who you know counts more than what you know.

Alex is a skilled administrator who was offered a job in the kitchen when her job was made redundant. Her public service organisation underestimated people’s attachment to their jobs. They thought that any job would do. That people only care about their pay packet not

about the content of their job. Your job is often your life and working in the kitchen as a replacement for your administrative job just does not cut it.

As Alex says:

> It's not fair on the kitchen or me or any of the people I am suppose to cook for.

So Alex decided to take the redundancy package.

> The package was good. It gave me the deposit on my first flat. And I was working with another hospital, not in their area, because the package said you cannot return to the public health service within 3 years but only in their area. So I went to the next suburb and I had a job within a fortnight

Alex's story highlights how dysfunctional and disorganised the public service is. The organisation can give public servants large pay-outs and then get employment in another public service organisation in a different geographical area. Even if that's only 10 kilometres away.

As Alex points outs:

> Yes, that they are willing to give you a huge payout and then re-employ you.
>
> The whole structure of it, the whole bureaucracy, is ludicrous.

No cross-fertilisation, no knowledge of what the left hand is doing. A false economy. Paying redundancies out of one bucket and re-employing the same people. No saving for the public purse. Robbing Peter to pay the same public servants. A mess of maladministration and 'silo mentality' (where you only think of your thin slice of the public service rather than the benefits to the public service as a whole).

## Carol

*It's very hard to get anywhere if you're just a chick playing it straight.*

Carol worked in a sexually charged public service environment. You would not expect a public service unit to be sexually charged. In fact the opposite would be the norm. Carol is

no wilting violet. She is a strong, charismatic woman full of intelligence and wit. Powerful, articulate and strong. Would not back down from a fight. But did not have what it takes to succeed in a man's world.

> *So in 2009 there will be no woman in management positions?*
>
> It's always been like that. It's really tragic. It's not because there is a shortage of woman in the service. It's quite good. It's like 50/50. I mean in terms of skills there are plenty of women.
>
> *Are there any old women or only old men?*
>
> Oh no. There are a couple of older women, who actually did try their hand in management and only lasted a couple of months. And said: You know what? I can't deal with this.
>
> *Because it's a fight every day.*
>
> Yeah. That's the way it works and it's always been that way.

Carol feels that her public service workplace is a boys' club.

> It always been a boys' club. Like they have boys' beers on a Friday.
>
> Stuff like that. Like beers at a workshop and it was all very blokey. And that sort of thing doesn't bother me but there is a difference in being blokey and still inviting chicks and being blokey and feeling as though you are an outcast. And it definitely fitted into the second basket.

Carol's workplace is openly discriminating.

> *So did they openly discriminate against you?*
>
> Oh yeah. I was told a few times that I was emotive. And that is why we don't have women in management because you can't make clear- cut decisions. You get too emotional.

You may be under the misapprehension that the public service had moved on from a 1950s' workplace. Carol's workplace did hark back to the bad old days of double standards when women were kept out of management positions because of their alleged over emotionality.

## Cathy

Cathy's story is about working for a selfish and moody boss who does not lead but devours the efforts of her team.

> She doesn't have a different focus. She's only focused on herself. And everything that we do belongs to her. Her reputation and her status.

Cathy is an articulate and competent woman. A self-reported workaholic. Really a boss's dream. Will always take on more work. Puts other's needs above her own. Serious about her job. But her moody, selfish, hostile boss got the better of her. Not easily stressed but off on stress leave, like many others in her public service organisation. Treated rudely, with contempt. Felt that her public service organisation did not even afford her basic human rights. Cathy worked for a boss who did not facilitate the work of others but rather used people for her own self-promotion and power plays. This boss underestimated the stock people have in doing good work. Certainly Cathy ached to do good work but her boss hindered rather than facilitated her work potential.

> She is totally contemptuous towards us.
> She loves to crush people. We are not acknowledged.

Cathy's story demonstrates that there are systemic problems in public service agencies that let managers wreak havoc with people's lives. She felt that her human rights were violated by this selfish boss who was known throughout the organisation. But nothing was done to stem the tide of damage in her wake.

> There's a real issues that I have. The managers know, HR know, Staff Relations know, the Deputy CO now knows. Everyone in my unit knows. And everyone in the organisation knows.
>
> And nothing happens. And no one will talk to her directly because they're scared of the repercussions. They're all frightened of her because she will come back at you. She'll be after you. And she tells you she's going to do it.

That is the opposite of supervision. That is demotivation; destructive and dehumanising.

## Harry

You would expect that Harry would be part of the boys' club. But during my research I came to discover that the boys' club does not open its doors to everyone and men, as well as women, can suffer at work until they break both psychologically and emotionally.

Harry is a third generation public servant. He is also a recovering alcoholic. His story highlights the culture of drinking in the public service. Do your work in the morning so you can get drunk at lunch time. He joined the public service while he decided what to do with his life. He has been a public servant for more than 30 years. He is on WorkCover at the moment. He has and had mental health issues due to his public service job. He has relationship problems. It is hard to determine what comes first. Troubles at work or troubles in your relationship. Certainly one has an impact on the other.

We are all experts on our own lives but Harry has an encyclopaedic knowledge of his public service life. Who said what, on what date. Harry is the best research participant because he can retell every conversation, the tone, the nuance. So generous with details of his life. Showed me his Work Quest evaluation and psychiatric report.

Public service managers need to understand that life happens and people have productive and non-productive times. A humane manager works around this and supports staff in good times and bad. Harry tried to return to his public service job. It is hard to give up. He went back and had a breakdown. He is still unable to return to work.

## Jane

*What do you tell a woman with two black eyes?*

*Nothing that you haven't told her twice already*

(Joke told by a senior manager at the staff meeting).

There are still places in the public service where women are unwelcome.

Jane works in a public service agency that is hostile to women in the extreme. To de-identify her workplace I will not mention the department. However women are still unwelcome and brutalised in public service organisations such as Corrective Services, Ambulance, Emergency services, Police, and Sheriff's departments. Anywhere a uniform is worn and the organisational structure and ethos is based on the military (Grube-Farrell, 2002). There is research (Miller, Forest and Jurik, (2003), Salin, (2009), Yancey Martin, (2003) into public service organisations where women are not welcomed in the station house, the court house or the fire station (Grube-Farrell, 2002). Jane's workplace is one based on the military, hostile to woman, hostile to difference. A cruel and hard environment. Where the worst thing you can be is a d..e, and management and co-workers systemically debase women until it is impossible to go to work. And if you live in a country town where this public service agency is the only place to earn a living then not working there means not being able to provide for your family.

Working at the department profoundly changed Jane. She took party drugs, became overweight, became an extreme risk taker.

> My personality changed. With my brothers and sisters I'm the sensible one and now it was 'Great, let's take party drugs'. They told me that my personality had changed.

Depressed. Disturbed. Detached. A gentle soul brutalised; dealing with the phallocentrism[4] of her public service workplace.

[4]The privileging of the masculine (the phallus) in understanding meaning or social relations.

## Janelle

*That's why I want to get out. Somewhere where I've got a chance to, you know, prosper.*

Janelle is a young woman, who joined the public service when she was 17. She has been a public servant for nearly a decade. She is doing hard time. She hates her job. So worried about security at such a young age.

> *Why don't you get out?*
>
> I want to but I just can't. It's really hard. I want another government job for security reasons. I don't want to go from bad to something just as bad.

Janelle comes from a family of public servants. Her brother, mother and father are in the service. Maybe that is why she feels she cannot leave. Janelle has so much unfulfilled potential. She cannot see that her job is taking away her shine. She is a young person weighed down by the drudgery of her job. Janelle is so betrayed by her public service job. You should not be so distraught by work when you are in your twenties. So bored, so underutilised, so disgruntled.

There is no place for youth in the public service. It is not an occupation that young people should aspire too. Because even if the new, young public servants start off shiny and new, the public service tarnishes them with boredom, bad management practices and dead ends. Certainly not the vibrant pulse of the nation. Rather a creature with a thready pulse concerned that it will never be revived again.

## Jessie

Jessie's story is one of power struggle, micromanagement and resentment.

> I don't care if my boss doesn't respect me but it makes it difficult to go to work. I mean this is taxpayers' money and the place is so ineffective and dysfunctional.

Jessie is an intelligent and thoughtful person. Very career-orientated. She is an ambitious, political animal on the fast track to promotion. Her job is her life. She defines herself by her job. She believes that people should be able to reach their goals in their own ways. You would not expect that anyone would mess with her. Yet she was badgered, belittled and maligned in her public service job. Being disenfranchised from the public service has severely impacted on her life. Her public service manager chose to micromanage her in the most abusive way.

Jessie's public service unit had been managed by an individual who was perceived as fair and helpful. The individual gave positive reinforcement when deserved and managed his team robustly and with compassion. When he retired he was replaced by an individual who caused havoc in many people's lives. Jessie described him as one of the 'Old Boys' and an 'organisational psychopath'.[5]

The appointment of this individual (K) was largely seen as undeserved. It was felt that K was promoted beyond his capabilities and experience. Although there are stringent rules on public service recruitment, K did not go through the interview process but was rather tapped on the shoulder as a reward for his many years in the job.

> K managed through terror. If you can't tolerate your boss it is really hard to go to work. In the public service, a manager should not have the power to wreck someone's life. How can a normal person have such hatred for a boss?
>
> K's behaviour is so reprehensible that normal people feel overwhelming rage and hatred.

Jessie's problems started when she corrected her public service supervisor's spelling.

> I corrected his spelling on a public document. I was crazy thinking he would be grateful that I saved him from public embarrassment. He went absolutely mental. Said I had no place in correcting his work. That I should show him

[5]An organisational psychopath seeks power and control over others, thriving on the suffering and misery inflicted upon co-workers (Clarke, 2008).

> respect. That I didn't understand the subtleties of his job. Please, he can't even spell subtleties.
>
> Said his work was none of my business and I should look in my own backyard with my alternative lifestyle.
>
> What does that mean? Alternative lifestyle? When I pressed him on this he waved me away.
>
> I still feel sick in the stomach when I think about that time. My lifestyle is not really alternative. I am a middle-aged public servant who wears grey and beige suits.

It would appear that correcting a supervisor's spelling is a public service travesty that will not be tolerated in any public service department. Take heed all aspiring public servants. Not only did Jessie's supervisor attack her professionally but also personally. In the public service this is unacceptable behaviour but not unheard-of behaviour. K's implication was she was a lesbian. His comments tell more about him than her. A homophobic misogynist, in charge of many people who do not fit his mould of what is appropriate.

And Jessie's working life went downhill. Most public servants believe that hard work will be rewarded. That management would not be irrational or hide behind policy to hurt people. That there should be fairness and transparency. That people will be judged on their work. People will be believed and trusted and able to reach their potential. However Jessie found herself working in a unit where she was abused, ambushed and alienated by her public service supervisor.

## Kelly

During a public service bonding exercise, Kelly was pushed off a chair during a game of musical chairs. Due to this she developed a deep vein thrombosis. It was left undiagnosed for weeks until it travelled to her lungs where it became critical. After many months of being away from the workplace, Kelly was put on a graduated return-to-work program.

Before this Kelly had very positive work appraisals. As with another of my participants who have been injured at work, Kelly was viewed with suspicion. Trying to rort the system. The graduated return-to-work was not well-managed or successful for either Kelly or the organisation.

Due to her workplace injury Kelly now suffers chronic illness, constant pain and depression. She can barely move or leave the house. She received a pay-out to leave the public service. At the time of her pay-out Kelly had no idea the level of impact her injury would have on her life.

> But I had no idea, at that stage, on how it was going to affect my life.
>
> Because I can't exercise. And I can see how much weight I've put on. And I think 'Oh my God'. Because I can't exercise and if I move my foot swells up so big. I can't fit it into shoes. The blood goes down and doesn't come up.
>
> Oh God the pain. That's why I started smoking dope because of the pain. Wendy has to massage my feet every night because it's gotten so bad. And because all the blood is pooled at my feet, it's doing me damage.
>
> It's seriously terrible.
>
> Because the clot moved to my lungs. You can't see anything on my body but my veins. Yours are like this. And mine are damaged from the clots. Which in turn makes it easier to get more clots. Which makes me faint. That's my life. And you don't realise how it impacts on you. If the chair is at the wrong angle my leg just goes dead. Like I can't sit at the wrong angle. And to shave your legs hurts. That really affects you. And all that stuff about sex. I mean you can't do it.
>
> I mean the weight of a sheet is too painful. I can't have a sheet on it. From the knee down it's all swollen up. Then I would undo my shoe laces and there would be blood underneath.

Here we have an ex-public servant, house bound, unavailable to move, unable to have sex, unable to shave her legs, unable to put a sheet on. The price of a bonding musical chair session is too high. No amount of money can compensate for a life so damaged.

Like all public service organisations there is a real reluctance to pay injured workers off. There is the presumption that injured public servants are malingerers. The injured worker is blamed for the injury and not informed of their rights or entitlements when knowledge of these things could have brought the injured worker back to work.

> Look they didn't want to pay me out. Or do graduated return to work. Or make reasonable adjustment. They didn't like the idea that they had to pay for an ergonomic work station.
>
> So I felt like a bit of a nutter. Because no one had told me things I could do. And you can only know what you know.

Like others, Kelly was kept in the dark about her entitlements. And without the knowledge the injury is exacerbated and the worker is more and more unable to return to work.

Kelly was connected to her work and believed in the public good she was facilitating. As she points out:

> I even got a card from the Aboriginal community in Redfern, when I left saying thank you for treating them with respect and facilitating speedy claims.

This is a person who wants to work but is now left overweight, depressed, sexless with the weight of a sheet being too much to bear.

## Lily

*I suppose I was always the wrong fit. Too much passion. There is no place for passion in the public service.*

Lily has an endless capacity to do. She is work-focused. She has put work before love, relationships and family.

Lily has been a public servant for a long time. Decades. She is a courageous, articulate, fiery feminist. Her career has included working in Women's Units, Corrections and Education. But she was reduced to suicidal thoughts by her public service workplace. In her words she would be rather be dead then have to go to work on Monday. Along with my other participants her story is not a happy one. It does appear that people who are totally invested in what they do; who see work as an integral part of their very being, fall the hardest when things fall apart.

> Just turning up to work was hell. It was like being in an abusive relationship. I hope no-one abuses me today. I hope my boss is sick. I'll just keep my head down. Don't get noticed.

A public service workplace should not resemble an environment of domestic violence. A fair-go for all is a mainstay of public service spin. A delusional mainstay in more than one public service agency.

What follows in a disturbing picture of Lily's workday.

> I used to sit with a bucket between my legs at my desk and vomit with the stress and no-one would say anything.

It makes you wonder if her colleagues hated her so much that a vomiting person deserves no acknowledgement, let alone sympathy. It is hard to imagine that people are reduced to such lack of empathy that they would let a fellow co-worker suffer without comment.

Lily had reached the glass ceiling. She saw incompetent men become her bosses. Young men become her bosses. She was put in a ridiculous position of 'dumb plodders' being her bosses. Embarrassed. Lily felt she had a breakdown. The darkest days of life that descended because of work.

> Looking back I think I had a breakdown. I wouldn't answer my phone just in case it was work. My new boss was a young guy. He rang and tried to have

> meetings with me but the thought of going to work would send me into a panic attack. This guy had no empathy. No 'emotional intelligence'. So the last conversation he rang me up and started yelling at me and telling me I would report to work tomorrow. And I said 'I will kill myself' This was not an idle threat. I was suicidal. Death for me was a better option than turning up to work on Monday morning. And this is etched on my mind for ever. He said 'That's neither here nor there. You will turn up to work on Monday'. What sort of management school did he go to do? What sort of human being would say that?

Lily was not the only participant who felt they had a breakdown due to work. Six of my participants reported that they had a breakdown caused by their public service job. Some were self-reported breakdowns and others were breakdowns diagnosed by doctors or psychiatrists. Psychological, physical or emotional breakdowns. A fracturing of themselves that not only had a devastating effect on their working lives but every aspect of their lives. You cannot leave your breakdown at the office door at five pm. You take that breakdown home and it ripples through your home life, your relationships, from the past into your future. Changing you as a person forever.

> I was miserable, unhappy, and suicidal – and yet I couldn't quit.
> I had such fear around quitting. I thought I would never get another job again.
> (Lily, 2010)

And yet she did. See the postscript for a happy ending, at last.

## Lisa

Lisa is an injured worker. Her story echoes others' stories in demonstrating that the public service is not good at looking after staff who are injured at work.

> From the moment I hurt my back until the present day I suddenly became a liability. I was difficult. Everything possible EXCEPT an injured worker.

The injured worker not only has the physical injury but when your public service organisation treats you as if you are a malingerer you can begin to suffer psychological injury.

As Lisa demonstrates:

> I got so depressed. I was invisible. I was in pain. It was just one error after the other.

And in the immortal words of an injured public servant.

> The system was f..ked. And the person in charge of the system was completely f..ked.

Although the public service has policies and procedures in place to deal with injured workers it seems the paper version and the reality is miles apart. Employers have a fiduciary duty to minimise and care for their injured workers.

Lisa, like others, was not told of their entitlements as an injured worker.

> No one told me what I was entitled to. My employer said the onus is on you as a worker to go and find these things out. Instead of giving you a package and saying ,'We injured you, we accept responsibility. Let us help us fix you'.

It is as if the system tries to keep workers in the dark to mitigate the risk and expense. However what happens when injured workers are not given the tools and support to return to work, is that the process takes longer, the individual is further damaged and the public service has again another worker who cannot function in the workplace.

## Lyn

> *When I go to work I feel as though I'm going to day detention, fulfilling a community service order. Seriously I feel as though I'm going to day detention every day.*

Lyn suffers at work. She is so sad, unhappy and depressed at her public service job. Lyn has been hospitalised in a psychiatric facility due to the weight of her unhappiness with her work life. Her unhappiness is palpable. You might think that Lyn is an incompetent worker.

Maybe so, in this degrading setting. However, Lyn took a secondment to another department and shone. Her performance was never called into question. Her hostile workplace destroyed her both mentally and physically. However, even if you are an incompetent worker you should not be psychologically abused. Abuse does not improve workers' abilities. In fact, it is likely to do the opposite. Judging people solely on their work performance is not compassionate or kind. Workers are not merely resources for meeting the employers' needs. This type of management, workers as means of production, does not account for the many things people are. Mothers, fathers, sons and daughters. Unique individuals with flaws and strengths. Abused workers can feel hypervigilant, depressed and sad. These reactions impact on every aspect of work. None of them positively.

The way Lyn was managed was to move her somewhere where she had very little interaction with other people, so as not to pollute the rest of working environment with her unhappiness. A person was also appointed to watch her and write a report. This does not seem a good use of the public purse. The report was 35 pages long and included things like: Lyn seems teary today.

> He kept a thirty five page report.
>
> Not only did he keep a diary of times but he also wrote stuff like Lyn looks teary today. Lyn lacks concentration today.
>
> *Did he not have enough to do?*
>
> I'm sure he didn't. Even like he approached me and said ' I've heard you've got a new fellow'.

However, whatever management had in mind, with the writing of the report it backfired because it then became evidence of harassment and bullying.

But Lyn was devastated.

> It was devastating to read. What they used to say. Which really got to the heart of me because I guess, I know it wasn't true. But if you wanted something, like your rightful conditions, like right to private practice, like professional

development leave, they would say 'No, you are not performing'. That wrenches my heart. Because I'm really invested in what I'm doing.

But they didn't want me or anything I could do. And then they wanted to tell me I was bad as well. And then wanted to deny and deny and tell me I wasn't productive.

Her job spilled over into her personal life. Leaving her entire life scarred and dysfunctional. Ending in her admission to a psychiatric hospital.

## Nicole

*There is no place for truth in the public service*

Nicole is a capable person, on the promotional track. Worked in a uniform but managed to thrive by learning 'the code'.

But with a seminal event her work and personal life unravelled. She told her work about her shattering experience and they used it against her. Truth is not a respected commodity in this public service unit. Nicole's experience is best described in her words.

*Was there a seminal event?*

I was trying to look after my mates. But then I was in a position of shafting them and I had no support. So I was just really torn.

I went for this job and I didn't cope at all. And I ended up basically losing the plot for 3 or 4 days. I was completely dysfunctional. I couldn't go out of the house. What I should have done in retrospect is rang up my boss and said, 'I'm going off sick and it's none of your business'. But I rang him up and said, 'I'm not coping with this,' and he shafted me.

*How did he shaft you?*

Well basically I wasn't allowed to do the job. I told him the job was c..p and I wouldn't fill that role anytime in the future. And with that he identified that I could never do it ever again. And that I was completely incompetent and all that.

Nicole's experience left her devastated both physically and emotionally.

> I had a fairly significant psychological event I think. I should have sensed that I should keep my mouth shut, rather than trust people and tell them the truth.
>
> You lose your identity. I sometimes think you have to go through this stuff as a learning process but I think if you got supported and you didn't have to go through a period when you think you are a loser. I thought, 'I'm never going to get anywhere in life'.

Nicole could never be described as a 'loser'. Yet her public service organisation took a recognised competent individual in a management role and reduced her to someone who thinks of themselves as a loser. The tragedy is that her workplace made her doubt her self-worth. The 'loser' idea came from within. That should not be part of the employee/employer contract. Public service work is not supposed to emulate an abusive relationship, which destroys your self esteem. This is the public service. Not the way to get the most out of the public service workforce.

Nicole is another one of my participants who self-disclosed that she had a breakdown. She believed her public service agency would respect her if she told the truth. But they used the truth against her. She believed that her public service organisation would look after her. And they did not. And she paid a psychological and physical price. And the public service was left with yet another worker unable to function in the workplace.

## Robyn

Robyn's story is one of displacement.[6]

In the public service when there is a restructure people are displaced. Even the language is disenfranchising. When I say restructuring one might think there is an attempt to renew or revitalise the public service but rather it is just moving the deck chairs on the Titanic.

[6]Displacement in the public service is when a permanent public servant loses their position but not their job. They are employed by the public service but are 'displaced' from any particular position within the organisation.

> I lost my job on September 24th 2003.
>
> Five and a half years I've been displaced. So don't ever let them tell you things happen quickly in the public service.
>
> Yes it took 6 months to get used to the fact that I had actually lost my job. But the first six months were absolutely shocking.

Robyn is a high-level public servant, with many skills and extensive experience. She has been a displaced public servant for many years. She has much insight into her situation. She is not an incompetent person but she is punished through the process of restructuring. She is an expert in being displaced. She knows every policy and process. Certainly she has more expertise in the displaced worker than her HR department. She told me because she had been abused as a child it helped her cope with the abuse she would receive as a displaced person in the public service.

But she really underestimated the multi-faceted aspects of being displaced and what that means for the individual.

> I really misunderstood the level of resistance to employing people off the displaced list. They don't want displaced people.

This is ironic because at the rate at which the public service restructures it would only be a matter of time before the majority of public servants have been displaced. Maybe there is displacement karma. One can only hope.

Robyn's story is sad. A story of policy gone mad, not followed but used to persecute. And it demonstrates the devastating effects being displaced has on the individual.

> I cried, I cried a lot. I cried at the end. It was just, it was really setting me up to fail and I did do that job. I did that job fine. I can do an 11/12[7] job easily.

[7] Grade 11/12 positions are the highest public service grade before you move to the State Executive Service.

The public service organisation you work for has both a legal and ethical obligation to give you meaningful, engaged and purposeful work. One would have thought there is a social contract in the work situation that work is given or provided for you. That is the very nature of work. However Robyn had a different experience.

> They're supposed to give me meaningful work to do.
>
> The bosses must give you meaningful work. Now there are two things there. Work and meaningful work. Which means work at your level. Like he shouldn't give me photocopying,
>
> And there were long, long periods where I was given no work to do at all. Let alone meaningful work.

The displaced person is demonised. Given no work, while others around are frantically working. And when given work, find it in the bin. That is not what the public expects of public servants. This is a systemic poison that compromises the integrity of our publicly funded system.

## Roger

A story of unfulfilled potential. Passed over. Furious at his treatment. A victim of inequitable recruitment practices. Jobs for the boys, except if you're not one of the boys. Left frustrated and enraged in the hands of his public service dysfunctional HR machine. An institution that does not keep records. You would have thought that this is the least a public service agency could do. Has to fight for every entitlement. In his public service agency there are no consequences for dysfunctional management. He has no trust in his employers to get it right. And without trust you cannot expect workers to do their best work.

Roger has worked in the same place for a decade. He has seen managers come and go. Each new wave of restructuring, rebuilding, refiddling. All taken with more than a grain of salt. Roger's vast knowledge of the past and the here and now is overlooked and discounted, as

the ‘most likely to succeed’ pass through his department on their way up the ladder or on their way out through redundancies.

Roger is interview-phobic. Quite the disadvantage in the interview orientated, self-promoting culture that has emerged in the public service. He has been ‘done over’ too many times. Each time he goes to an interview his heart, his pride, his sense of self is on the line. And each time he does not get the job he could do with his eyes closed he is devastated. Any passion for his job is eroded. Any good will is destroyed. Then he is expected to train the person who did get the job on the policies, procedures and operational matters. The wound of rejection is opened again and again until it cannot heal. Where it festers. And he goes to work injured and resentful. No good will come of that. Not for Roger, nor his managers nor the public he interacts with on a daily basis. His potential thwarted but he still has decades to go to pay his mortgage and reach retirement.

## Rose

*You cannot work in the system if you care too much. Because if you care and take it to heart when you see these things happening you get very disillusioned.*

Rose’s story chronicles the life of a passionate disability worker. She is a fierce advocate for people with profound disabilities. We, as a humane society, need to have more dedicated people in the area of disability work. There is a great need for passionate and competent people to represent those who cannot speak for themselves. Her dedication is overwhelming. If I or a loved one had a profound disability I would want Rose to look after me or them. The fight in her is inspiring. But the cost to her is too high. Her story is disturbing because it involves the most vulnerable in our society.

Rose is sympathetic and empathic. She has common sense and an ability to meet the needs of profoundly disabled people. She feels the pain of those she works with. What a horror

story her public service working life is. Charged with the care of vulnerable people who are abused by staff and others.

Rose spends her days battling with the administrative hierarchy for the bare minimum for her clients. She has seen too much. Has witnessed administrative evil and been helpless to fix it. Has seen people damaged and abused and been helpless to fix it.

Rose embodies the stated ideals of the delusional public service but cannot work there because of what it does to people in the care of the state. She highlights the disconnect between what is written on paper and what happens in the real world.

> What they put on paper about their expectations and what they put in the quality framework, it's never interpreted in a practical sense. But as long as they have it on paper, as long as they distributed it as widely as they can, so that people think, when they pick up the brochure, 'Wow, the department values honesty and teamwork,' you know, collaborative relationships. But as long as it's on paper they are doing the right thing. You walk around any Community Residential Unit, you'll see that it's just not happening.

Rose despairs not only about management and lack of resources but also about other staff members.

> And staff who don't give a s..t and they are quite happy for residents to be in clothes that are torn, have faeces on the walls, never have personal care attended to, are lazy and don't give a s..t will last longer than people who genuinely care.

But Rose is a passionate worker who cares and can deconstruct the competencies of a capable and competent disability worker.

> When you look at the qualities of people who work in disabilities, it is problem- solving and being reasonable.
>
> People who genuinely care, who come to work to make a difference, to really care for these people and not just clock on and clock off and walk away with a pay cheque. The ludicrous thing is that the people who have the values that the

> department advocates in their brochures and mission statement cannot work in the system. Passionate staff get burnt out. Because you are constantly coming up against brick walls.
>
> It's really sad, because you think a person with those qualities would be welcomed because they will be able to see problems and be able to facilitate change and solutions.

This is a public service agency that is charged with the care and best interests of the most vulnerable people in our society. Rose's story shows that in Australia, in the 21st century, vulnerable people suffer in the hands of government either through incompetence or design.

> I mean I started working with the department as an enthusiastic, positive caring person and walked away completely disillusioned and troubled because of the experience.

## Sally

*I have lots of serious problems in my life but it really saddens me that in these last days of my working life, because I'm sixty, I'm being treated in such a cruel and unprofessional manner.*

Pushed down. Depressed. The weight of her public service job is heavy on Sally's shoulders. She is caught in the superannuation trap.[8] Sixty years old. Too young to retire, but too old

[8]For the International reader. In Australia Superannuation (Super) is a way of saving for your retirement by putting money into an account where interest is not taxed.

Superannuation is governed by law which states that your employer must pay superannuation contributions for you, on at least 9% of your wages. This money is not taken from your wages, but is a benefit paid on top of those wages. You usually cannot withdraw your super until you reach a certain age (generally 60 years plus).

Whilst access to super is limited, the tax treatment of super is often favourable when compared to other similar investment avenues.

Many public servants who joined their super scheme pre 1985 can retire on 3/4s of their pay.

for the hostile public service environment. Ignored, ostracised, passed over. There is nothing in her working life that brings her joy, or satisfaction or accomplishment.

Sally is completely at odds with her boss.

> Well my boss I believe is quite ineffective in many ways. He doesn't produce anything and he doesn't manage. So he is a complete waste of time.
>
> He has spent twenty years ingratiating himself to people in the upper echelons.
>
> My boss has created a kingdom. Where he is no longer ugly, where he has these young girls playing up to him and he will look after them. He is no longer a mediocre intellect. He has other people doing the work. It appears he is involved. He doesn't do anything. He doesn't make any contribution. He doesn't get involved.

Having such contempt for your boss taints your working life. When there is no respect it is difficult to do honourable work in the best interest of the public and the organisation.

Sally feels she has been discriminated against because of her age. Everywhere she turns she sees evidence of ageist practices. This is the lens she views her working life through. Not a joyful or a shining place to be.

> There's been discrimination in every way in my unit based on age. There are very young inexperienced women who have been given opportunities.
>
> So it comes to the situation where I'm concentrating on my job, and it was only when there was blatant discrimination that I spoke up.
>
> Well it was so blatant because this woman, even though she shows a lot of promise, she was inexperienced and her work wasn't anywhere near the standard of my work. So there was discrimination involved. Anyway I went above his head and I was allocated to another position at the same level.

Sally has been passed over for promotion and kept out of the loop and 'sent to Coventry'. Not the makings of a functional team player. Her position was advertised. There is nothing more destabilising than having your public service job ripped out from under you with no warning and no recourse. Just part of public service life.

> The next thing I know is that my position is being advertised.
>
> That's already being advertised and I decided not to apply because I thought they need me more than I need them.
>
> I couldn't do the job anyway. I couldn't do my management job because they tried to beat me at every turn. I started to become rather ill and thought; this is not worth it and I didn't apply for the position but I'm waiting, I'm still acting in the position. I'm still being paid for the position and waiting for them to tell me who's got the position.

Her public service experience has made her both physically and emotionally unwell. Here is an experienced woman whose health is jeopardised by her public service employment. It should not be part of your daily working life that your health is compromised. Surely the best possible outcome for any workplace is that workers come with joy and vigour. The public service should strive to be such a workplace.

After all these years Sally feels she has been abandoned by her public service organisation.

> Well, it's very hard. If this is human nature, to me it's very undignified.
>
> I would be full of guilt. There's nothing I can do.

## Sharon

*Lesbian, liar, malingerer.*

Sharon works in a male-dominated area. In a uniform. Partly in the field and partly in an office. She joined her department as a career change. Her experiences have been incredible in a bad way. Hard to believe that such behaviours happened in a publicly-funded workplace.

Management called her a lesbian, a liar and a malingerer. Apparently these are the worst things one can be in her public service organisation. When I say 'management' I mean more than one rogue supervisor. Her bosses' boss, the Human Resource department and other people of authority called into question her sanity, her integrity and her sexual orientation.

Her story started with correcting her supervisor's spelling. Her public service workplace has people with very poor literacy skills. As an aside, you would not expect that anyone working in the public service could not read or write. However in this thesis journey I came across examples again and again of public servants with poor literacy skills sometimes in supervisory positions.

A rule of thumb learnt from Sharon's experience is never, never correct your supervisor's spelling. All sorts of retaliation will rain down on you.

From the spelling correction incident, things deteriorated quickly for Sharon. She was abused, ostracised, disciplined, and moved from her place of work. Her competence was brought into question. She was performance managed. She became a whistleblower. She told people who should care about the most disturbing actions of co-public servants in uniforms.

Sharon was sent to a psychiatrist as punishment for exposing the behaviours of her fellow officers and for complaining about her treatment. Sharon was not the only participant sent to the psychiatrist as punishment for complaining about treatment at work. Her experiences were less than satisfactory. Using occupational psychiatry as a means of disenfranchising workers is a special type of evil.

> That was when I was on workers' comp because they were causing me anxiety. Which they never acknowledged. And because even though I was totally upset and really completely devastated I was still able to function. Remember when that woman came to my house. It was so invasive. She was a psychiatrist and she came to talk to me. And because my house was tidy and I made her a cup of tea, she decided there was nothing wrong with me because I was still able to function adequately.
>
> Why don't you come and watch me in the workplace and see how these people treat me and what they do to me and then follow me home and see how I'm affected?
>
> So that's my problems: I can spell and I'm not a liar.

> I should have just f..king lied. I mean that was the second time I had been sent to see the psychiatrist. And he was a f..king a...hole. He applied what is known as the Malingerer's Index. [9]
>
> Yes and that was what they said about me. That I was a malingerer. Because I was deliberately trying to make myself seem worse than what I was.
>
> That is so not me.

Sharon has a strong sense of self. A strong sense of social justice. A strong work ethic. Calm and under control. Her story makes me weep.

With Sharon, if her initial issue with her supervisor's spelling was dealt with in a prompt and reasonable matter then maybe the other impending disaster could have been averted. At the end of six years of hell she was sent a letter thanking her for her tenacity and professionalism. Lord help us.

Still in the public service. Still battling the environment. Deserves a medal. But now:

> I don't give a f..k about it. But I hate it. I really hate it. I hate management taking advantage of people because of their lack of knowledge.

## Tom

*You know I've been up to the manager a few times and I've said ' If you don't like the way I've conducted myself, you know you are quite at liberty to terminate my services'.*

Tom's story could be called 'Sack me please'. Tom has been a public servant for twenty eight years. Tom is old-school public service. However he is extremely unhappy with his public

[9] The Malingerer's Index is a psychological test given to people to measure if they are presenting worse than they really are. It is used to measure if a person is a malingerer. It is used in the public service, health and sport injuries areas.

service unit and is disenfranchised.  Tom has witnessed the transformation into the new public service. He sees it as new incompetence, new laziness and new lameness.

Tom believes there is not a court in the land that wouldn't support his termination. He has put in writing all his complaints. He has been labelled 'disgruntled' by HR and management. He openly admits that at times his behaviour has been quite outrageous. Yet he has still not been fired. But he is restless. After all this time he is moving toward a new career.

As Tom states

> There is nothing worse in life than regret.
> I'm close to the tipping point.
> It's now or never.

It has been twenty eight years. Tom has the guts to move. It is not an easy choice for long-term public servants. When you are immersed in the misery, it is hard to see a way out.

Read Tom's postscript for an unexpected happy ending.

## Wendy

> *I know the very instant I got breast cancer. When I was accused of fraud.*

Work nearly killed Wendy.

Wendy is a breast cancer survivor. She believes that work gave her cancer. Her cancer was linked to her dysfunctional workplace and the treatment she received there.

Wendy felt that if something was unfair and unjust you should go down the official path of appeals and grievances. Wendy was a firm believer in the public service process. She trusted the system to her detriment.

No-one wins when you go the official route, especially not the complainant. Wendy was adamant about being in the study;

> It's really important you get these stories down. That someone links these stories. My God, we know so many people who have suffered at the hands of those monster bosses.

Wendy's story is a tale of official grievances both by her and against her. If you put a grievance in, as is your public service right, you become a pariah. And if the person you put the grievance in about becomes your boss then you are *persona non grata*. Given no work, given no opportunities. Viewed with suspicion. Not trusted. Much hated. Turning up every day puts your health, both mentally and physically, at risk. And that risk for Wendy was breast cancer. A price too high to pay.

# Chapter Two - Methodology

*Now the rhetorically-minded seem prescient...or the masks of methodology are wearing thin*

*- Nelson, 1987.*

The ability to maintain a construction of reality involves the ability to locate one's work in the body of knowledge and decide which methodological mask to assume (Lather, 2007). This research examines the experiences of public servants who are disenfranchised. The data for this study were collected through interviews with public servants who viewed themselves as disenfranchised. Twenty interviews were undertaken, recorded and transcribed.

This is a qualitative study drawing on a range of methods. A hybrid approach has been undertaken that takes the wisdom of ethnographic case studies, phenomenology, feminist post-structuralism and narrative theories. This range of methodological disciples helps to explore and make sense of the stories of people working within organisations which have failed, traumatised, belittled, ignored, bullied or destroyed them.

The data for this study was analysed using a range of methodological tools. This strategy was used to get to the essence of the multi-faceted character of the participants' stories. From the stories, the narrative evolved which were also explored to find some universality to the individuals' experiences. From the participants' narratives themes emerged. These themes formed the structure of this thesis. The themes identified included: the personality of tyranny: the scourge of professionalism: displacement: thwarted potential: more than just bad behaviour and pain and toxicity in the public service workplace. This was done by the researcher to get closer to the participants. A computer program was intentionally not used so that an intimacy could be formed between the narratives and the researcher.

Bricolage is a set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation. The researcher as bricoleur uses whatever strategies, methods or evidence that comes to hand. This is true for my research. The data dictated which way it was analysed. Using phenomenology, ethnography, or narrative themes. These methods are often used in conjunction. But the idea of the researcher as bricoleur encapsulates this practice. In its critical concern for just social change the bricolage seeks insight for the margins. In gaining insight from the margins this helps to reshape and sophisticate social theory and research methods. To contribute to social transformation, bricoleur seek to better understand both the forces of domination that affect the lives of individual from outside the dominant culture (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p 169).

Computer programs were not used to analyse the data. Listening and re-listening to the participants' voices, hearing not only the words, but the tone and timbre of the words was important in the analysis. Hearing the silences also added to the richness of data. All this works best with a personal, face to face connection the researcher has with a participant.

## Ethnography

Ethnographic research develops understanding from an insider's point of view (Manns and Chad, 2001). Researchers who claim insider status indicate that they share cultural membership with the group under investigation. Researchers who assert insider position allow them to have insights that outriders could not have. Researchers who reflect about their stance offer more trustworthy and honest accounts (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). I have asserted that my insider status gives me more opportunity to find the 'truth.' Truth, and any agreement regarding what is valid knowledge, arises from the relationship between members and participants. Agreements about truth may be the subject of community negotiations regarding what will be accepted as truth (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

As a disenfranchised public servant I am an insider and can bring a level of understanding to the participants' experiences. I too see through my disenfranchised lens. I am not dispassionate. I feel these people's pain. I can pay respect to the words of my participants because they are words I am familiar with. I can empathise with their feelings, because their experiences are my experiences. Because I am embedded in this network it would be impossible, undesirable and unethical to become a detached researcher. Research from the insider's view gives the research an extra dimension of heart and soul. Ellis (2004) labels this as empathy, identification and reflexivity in fieldwork. This is the 'then you know how I feel' concept. This is extremely important in my research. I want to study the experiences of the disenfranchised public servant as a disenfranchised ex-public servant. Indeed being in this situation allows me access to this sometimes hidden and always marginalised population.

'Including the subjective and emotional reflections of the researcher adds context and layers to the story being told about participants (Ellis, 2004), p 62)'. Ethnography has a personal and intimate nature (Miller and Russell, 2005). The researcher makes a personal and individual connection with the participant. This certainly was the case for me. Because I listened to the participant's story at interview and then listened to their interview over and over again to write it up, I felt that I was very close to my participants. The researcher's personal, professional and political standpoints influence the ethnographic researcher (Miller and Russell, 2005). There is no doubt that this is the case in my research.

This research aims to gain understanding along with the participants rather than by studying the participants. A focused ethnographic study concentrates on a specific area of inquiry and may be used to improve people's experiences (Manns and Chad, 2001).

Ethnographic writing is based on interpersonal relationships. These relationships gain authenticity from the quality of personal experiences, the richness and depth of individual voices and a balance between engagements with others and self-reflexive considerations of those engagements (Goodall, 2000, p 14). As a disenfranchised public servant the bond

between participants and interviewer happens very quickly. The disenfranchised public servant is part of a club where the experiences are similar.

In reflexive ethnography, the authority of the ethnographer is challenged, the ethnographer becomes part of the inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002). Reflexive ethnographers use their own experiences in a culture "reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 740). Reflexive ethnography is "where the researcher's experiences are actually studied along with other participants" (p. 740). Reflexive ethnographers anchor their experimental (and traditional) writing in an ongoing moral dialogue with the members of a local community (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002).

## Phenomenology

I aim to analyse the narrative material by conducting a thematic analysis in a phenomenological sense. In this way the themes are not a rule-bound process but a free act of 'seeing meaning' (Van Manen, 1990, p 79). Phenomenological themes, as described by Van Manen (1990) are the 'structures of experience' (p 79). When we analyse a phenomenon, like the experiences of disenfranchised public servants, we are trying to find what the experiences mean both at an individual and human kind level.

Phenomenology is the interpretive study of human experience. The aim is to examine and clarify human situations, events, meanings, and experiences 'as they spontaneously occur in the course of daily life' (Von Eckartsberg, 1998, p 3). The goal is 'a rigorous description of human life as it is lived and reflected upon in all of its first-person concreteness, urgency and ambiguity' (Pollio, Howard and Thompson 1997, p 5). As I have a desire to make meaning of the lived experience of disenfranchised public servants, using phenomenological reflection is useful for both methodology and analysis.

I see myself as a 'chronicler' in the tradition of Patti Lather. I also acknowledge the inevitable interpretive weight of a researcher in telling data stories (Lather, 2007 p 52). Lather's case studies, working with HIV-positive women, provide a useful methodological model for my study. Her discussion of these issues and the ways to respect the stories of others are useful in gaining insights into my participants' experiences. It also serves as a model to help honour the words of my participants: to pay justice to the very brave acts of revealing their sufferings and sorrows to a stranger. Lather (2007) grapples with the possibilities and limits of feminist ethnography in addressing issues around the crisis of representation. These discussions are useful for my research as they explore the limits of language when trying to capture not just the words, but the essence of a person's experiences. Lather (2007) also unpacks the idea that listening and telling people's stories can contribute to struggles for social justice in the way that could be useful to the participants.

## Post-structuralism

Postmodern researchers acknowledge that there are different subjectivities and realities (Brophy, 2001). Post-structuralism takes into consideration the crisis of representation. The narrative represents the web of structure, sign and play of social relations. In post-structuralism it is not a matter of looking harder or closer but rather seeing the spaces between what is said and what constitutes power (Lather, 2007). Many of my interviews centred on the misuse of power. My participants saw themselves as 'other', not part of the powerful paradigm. Considerations of power were also explored within the relationship between me and the interviewees. Due to my insider researcher status these relationships were more collaborative. One disenfranchised colleague talking to another. One disenfranchised colleague listening to another.

Feminist research has led researchers to be more reflexive, more conscious of power relationships. Feminist researchers are more sensitive to arguments about knowledge, how it is created, endorsed or identified, and by whom (Sampson, Bloor and Fincham, 2008). The

researcher has a voice but also imparts the voice of the participant. This type of research is careful to present knowledge through her own paradigm while being sensitive to the views of others (Bernal, 2002; Guba and Lincoln, 2005). Combining feminist and post-structuralist theories together makes for a useful theoretical framework in analysing power, knowledge and difference in my study of disenfranchised public servants.

Power is a key linking theme between feminism, post-structuralism and my study. According to Ropers-Huilman (2001) there is no space free of power relations. Power, who has it and who does not, is an underlying ripple in my case studies. The study can be seen as a microcosm of society and the public service as a place that replicates and ruptures society as a whole. Lessons learnt through deep reflection on the experiences of disenfranchised public servants have implications for the world of work and organisational culture.

A feminist post-structuralist discourse attends to socially-reinforced relationships that are affected and reproduced in the public service. It questions the forms and effects of empowerment and therefore the inverse, disenfranchisement (Ropers-Huilman, 2001). The discourse examines the sources of power and resistance. Foucault's (1978) image of the postmodern world is where power relations are questioned and there is continuous subversion, resistance and demystification of power. This does not fit well with the traditional hierarchy of the public service, where power is clearly delineated and expected to be respected. This clash of postmodern ideas, where people want to have control over their own working lives, leads to malcontent, rupture and disenfranchisement.

Difference is another concept explored and deconstructed by both feminists and post-structuralists. Difference creates tension and contradiction (Ropers-Huilman, 2001). Modern management theories view this difference as opportunities for growth. However the majority of public service units views tension and contradiction as aberrant behaviour that needs to be performance-managed. Maybe there is a public service unit that values difference and looks for ways to ensure that people are respected and their working life in

fulfilling. I have just never come across this public service Utopia nor have the participants in this study.

A feminist post-structuralist approach allows one to focus on the experiences of the 'other'. 'Others' are those who are not part of the dominant paradigm. They are the outsiders, those who do not fit the mould, and those who just do not fit in. This study is about validating their experiences and bearing witness to the dysfunctional interactions that my participants have experienced and described while working in the public service.

## Narrative theories

*All sorrows can be borne if you can put them in a story*

*-Arendt 1958*

Narrative theory sees stories at the heart of human meaning making, for individuals, communities and organisations. Individuals construct identities through story telling. Individuals use stories to excavate and reassess memories. In a dynamic way stories help participants make sense of the past. Stories invite us to enter the perspective of the narrator. Analysing the perspective of the disenfranchised public servant is one of the aims of the research (Riessman 2008).

Narrative gives expression to an individual's internal representation of phenomena including events, thoughts and feelings. Narrative researchers should consider the social and cultural character of personal stories. Understanding of the culture adds to the narrative and the narrative enables clearer understanding of the culture (Andrews, Squire and Tambouka, 2008). That is why a narrative methodology is useful for my research, because an understanding of public service culture not only informs the participants' stories but allows

for an insight into a dysfunctional workplace environment. Story-telling forms community. There is a critical point in a narrative where the listener hooks (SooHoo, 2006).

Although not all oppression is the same, the predictability of exclusion is strikingly clear; we all have been 'othered' and we have all 'othered' 'others'. The examination of everyday marginalisation, laced with suffering and rage, allows us to critique such behaviour, and with this critique there is some degree of liberation from the devaluing of human endeavours (SooHoo, 2006, p 18 - 19). This has informed my study. By telling their stories many of my participants felt liberated, relieved, exhausted and exhilarated but all of them felt 'heard'.

Narrative theories allow for liberation through talk. Using narrative theory as a methodology I hope to see layers of meanings, and use these layers to reach conclusions about the nature of individuals as public servants and the nature of the public service itself. The narrative allows the researcher to describe, understand and explain important aspects of the world (Andrews et al., 2008). This approach led to the construction of the chapters. The participants' stories shaped the chapters and directed the study to explain the important aspects of the disenfranchised public servant.

## Heroes of our stories

You may think that people who have suffered disenfranchisement at work would want to keep it quiet, be ashamed or be embarrassed. My participants were desperate to have someone listen to them. Someone who could understand their predicaments: someone who was also 'other' like them: someone who had experienced the same disenfranchisement. My participants had often worn out the listening welcome mat of their partners, families and friends. Silence only exacerbates the issues around disenfranchisement. By isolating those who are disenfranchised, the sins and atrocities can continue. When public servants

cannot speak out about and be heard, individuals suffer psychologically, physically and emotionally. This is apparent in the stories of my participants.

People make sense of their lives by knitting the past, present and future together through story (SooHoo, 2006). These were stories that had been told and retold. These were stories that partners, families and friend groaned about because of the telling and retelling. In narrative we revise and edit the remembered past to square with our identities in the present (Riessman, 2007). We use the narrative as a way of expressing personal identity and agency (Andrews et al, 2008).

We are all heroes of our own stories. We construct them so we can elicit pathos or sympathy or outrage in the listener. The public servants I interviewed were experts in their own stories. Through the endless retelling and the endless thinking about it, my participants were insightful, reflective and generous. They all had theories about why their disenfranchisement had occurred. However being witness to so many stories gave me a unique opportunity to look for common trends, themes and incidences about disenfranchised workers in the public service.

## Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling technique was used in this study because it enabled the researcher to interview public servants who felt and labelled themselves as disenfranchised. Purposive sampling targets participants who are information rich (Manns and Chad, 2001). Five would-be participants, who labelled themselves as disenfranchised public servants already known to the researcher through networks established while working in the public service, were contacted initially by letter.

Networks in this instance refer to both the formal and informal connections around but not necessarily in the workplace. Employing personal networks meant that people whose voices were often left unheard or invalidated in the public service culture were able to be heard. Also being part of the social and professional network was important because my participants could check me out both as a person, a researcher and as a disenfranchised public servant. Consequently my identity, a fellow disenfranchised public servant, played an important role in the recruitment of my participants. As Brown (2005) found in her research, the participants trusted her more because she was part of the identified group, part of the 'other', rather than an outsider, studying the aberrant behaviour of disenfranchised public servants. Trust and rapport were already established of similar experiences and heartaches. Although my tragedies might have happened in another public service department, one might readily transpose the experience to any public service department. If you scratch a public servant we all bleed blue, and in triplicate.

Rubin (2005) discusses the appropriateness of accessing participants through social networks. Through these networks the researcher can assess experienced and knowledgeable interviewees. Participants with a story to tell and who are willing to tell it. In the process of finding participants for my study more than 400 people made themselves available. Even now at the end of my study I still receive phone calls from public servants who feel disenfranchised and who want to tell their stories.

Also using networks helped with issues of confidentiality. Because my participants knew I was not in a public service management position they knew I would not reveal their experiences to people in authority. This was especially important because careers can be ruined through the revelation of details. Although the public service employs many thousands of people, it is a small community where people know each other's business and mistreatment and unfairness is noticed throughout the organisation. Noticed but not acted upon.

Proposed participants in the research labelled themselves as disenfranchised from the workplace even though they may not use that terminology. Often people label themselves as unhappy, dissatisfied and depressed about their working life. They feel disconnected and unfulfilled. They may say they have given up or lack inspiration from colleagues, managers and even themselves. Gardner (2007) states:

> When workers have no motivation except a pay cheque and there is a misalignment between worker's expectations and the reality of the working environment then workers feel and label themselves as disenfranchised (*Good Work Project*).

## Snowball sampling

Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that is used by researchers to identify potential subjects in studies where subjects may be hidden. Snowball sampling is a technique for developing a research sample where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances. Thus the sample group appears to grow like a rolling snowball. It increases the possible population to be interviewed. Snowball sampling is also useful in discovering hidden populations (Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment, 2009).

Snowball sampling helps to determine stakeholders, builds on existing networks and helps uncover stakeholders unknown to the researcher. It contacts one participant via the other. To study sensitive subjects an individual's social networks are instrumental is accessing hard to reach or sensitive populations (Brown, 2005).

Gilbert (1993) states that because snowballing technique involves the personal recommendation of a contact it vouches for the legitimacy of the researcher. The researcher might be perceived as a 'friend of a friend,' whereas the participant is viewed as an expert on his or her own experiences. It targets sample members in a network who share a certain

experience or characteristic. In my research that experience is one of disenfranchisement from the workplace. Snowball sampling also avoids the problems associated with labelling a certain group, because the participants themselves self-nominate. Snowball sampling relies on the willingness of the participants to be involved in the research.

In snowball sampling it is important that the research experience is positive because if the participants have a negative experience this can be recounted to potential participants, stopping the snowball by discouraging would be participants to be involved (Brown 2005).

The snowballing process enabled me access to a large pool of public servants who felt dissatisfied, unhappy and disenfranchised at work. The beginning of the snowball was through word of mouth from my initial five invitees. Then like ripples people found out that there was an opportunity to tell their story to someone who would listen.

In this study nineteen participants were uncovered through snowballing. Only one of the initial five was actually interviewed. The reason for this was the snowballing was so effective that there was an avalanche of people from all corners of the public service wanting to take part in the study. The inbox were full of messages that stated 'You don't know me but I would love you to listen to my story'. I was trusted because I was a friend of a friend.

The Ethics Committee questioned the availability of participants and doubted there would be enough people to interview. That was not the case. I was overwhelmed with people who wanted to tell their story to someone who listened, and recorded it and took notes. The way the participants were chosen was I rang them to talk about the notion of disenfranchisement, as discussed in my ethics' proposal. If that conversation demonstrated to me that the person had a compelling story to tell and wanted to tell it I organised a face to face interview. This meant travel to other states and rural areas. As the interview process

progressed I found myself pursuing different types of stories. For example I interviewed a person who had been injured at work and due to her horrific experience I interviewed another injured worker to see the similarities or differences. I also chose participants whose stories were compelling. Who had been sexually harassed, suffered gender discrimination, been displaced; had been bullied, victimised, ostracised or ignored. I also tried to get a range of ages, experiences, pay grades and gender.

People give interviews because they want to give their side of the story (Rubin, 2005). Or people need to talk about terrible experiences so they can express their grief and reduce their terror. The researcher can recognise and empathise with the pain and by this process of reflection can make the suffering more manageable and maybe more meaningful for the participant. The participants and I often tried to track back to who was the initiator of the snowball from the initial five invitees but like ripples in a pond the origin was hard to pinpoint.

## Interviews

The study used interviews as a means of exploring and gathering narrative material to serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of the experiences of the disenfranchised public servant. The interview was used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relationship with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience. This type of interviewing is embedded in hermeneutic phenomenological human science. There are six integral parts to this research activity;

- turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
- reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
- describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- manipulating a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;

- balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (Van Manen, 1990, pp. 30-31).

My research fits into this framework. There is no doubt that my research seriously interests me from both a personal and professional view point. By telling the stories of disenfranchised public servants I make a commitment to showing their struggles in an empathetic and compassionate way. I think it is extremely important that researchers research what they live and see rather than what they read. This study is firmly based in the lived experience rather than the conceptualisation of that experience. There has been reflection and analysis of the characteristics of the phenomenon of disenfranchised public servants through the art of writing and rewriting to really capture the essence of people. I have reached many conclusions through this study of disenfranchisement but always keep in mind the importance of the individual as it makes up the collective experiences of the study's cohort.

The *Good Work Toolkit* (Gardner, 2004) provides a framework for individuals to consider the kind of workers they are now and the kinds of professionals they want to become. Like the *Good Work Project* this research aims to explore the domain of the public service through intensive, face to face interviews (Gardner, 2001). The conceptual framework underpinning these case studies relies on the *Good Work Project Toolkit* and Stake's work on the *Art of Case Studies* (Gardner et al., 2004; Stake, 1995).

At the beginning of my data collection I had a list of prompts but I found that I did not need them. I would say 'I've heard you had troubles'. And then two hours, three hours, seven hours later the interview had unfolded. I often heard myself saying 'I know, I know, of course, of course'. The interviews were so alike it was frightening. Despite the gender, the age, the department, seniority, all had experiences that made you ashamed to be part of the public service.

At the outset I imagined that I would analyse the interviews using a feminist methodology because I presumed that the issues were based on gender lines because that is how I felt my disenfranchisement occurred. However due to the snowball sampling used in my study, there were several men who wanted to tell their stories. These interviews made me question my bias and showed me that disenfranchisement cuts across gender and age and social status. It showed me that you must come to any inquiry involving the human condition with an open mind. And there must be some self reflection after the interviews and the analysis of where you sit in terms of long held beliefs and conceptions of what the world of work is or what it should be. The study showed me that all my interviewees had a range of demeanours and characteristics. Before I started the study, I hypothesised that certain types of individuals would be disenfranchised. In fact I held stereotypes of the type of people who may become disenfranchised. Maybe quiet, passive people who came across as victims or loud obnoxious people that needed to be put in their place. My participants were extroverts and introverts, loud people and quiet people, reserved people and pushy people. Disenfranchisement can happen to anyone.

## The Immediacy Transfer

The interviews all indicated that a poor work experience not only has negative consequences around the time of incident but that these consequences continue over time and in other workplaces. The event does not exist in the employee's memory as an historical event but rather in the present, here and now. This suggests the social, psychological and financial cost of unresolved disenfranchisement is very profound both for individuals and for the public service itself. For the functionality of the public service peoples' issues need to be dealt with in a timely manner.

Disenfranchising experiences from the past can affect the way workers think about their current workplace and workplace relationships. This disenfranchisement influences how

workers respond and react in their new workplace. This past disenfranchisement can amplify the negative impacts of past, present and future experiences.

The evidence for this assumption comes from the interviews. When a participant came to the part of their story that revealed the cause of their disenfranchisement, the participant changed from speaking in the past tense to the present tense. It was eerie. I heard it both in the tapes and in the interviews. There would be a pause and the timbre of the participants' voice would change. And it was like I was there, to see their shame, or rage or dismantling. This phenomenon was not isolated. In more than half of the interviews it happened. It was where I could tell the real damage happened. It was the chestnut of future sorrows. The stories ranged from: being chastised for correcting the manager's spelling, being bullied in public, being molested by colleagues, being retrenched, being ignored, having your newsletter torn up, seeing a dead colleague who had hanged himself in the office on Friday night so his colleagues could discover him on Monday.

Some of these incidents happened thirty years ago and still were the spring of malcontent. I call this phenomenon the 'Immediacy Transfer' because it transfers the most painful past into the present and all the emotions and suffering are transferred into the immediate moment. What far-reaching effects such incidences have for the individuals and the public service.

In Gardner's (2001) research he discusses transforming moments where an experience seemed pivotal or transforming for a person's career. Gardner (2001) discusses transforming moments in a positive sense, where people change for the better. The transforming moments for my participants seem to have scarred them forever, and with an accumulating effect.

In finding supportive material to the Immediacy transfer an investigation into psychologists' practical strategies for dealing with traumatic events in clients' lives was undertaken. A traumatic memory can be recalled with a sense of vividness, a sense of being present or a sudden sense of reliving the past (Taylor,2011). This describes the experiences of some of my participants. Taylor (2011) discusses unresolved traumatic events. The memory is detailed, vivid, in your face. It seems more recent than it actually is. For example: I remember it just like it was yesterday. So just like my participants a person can carry negative beliefs into their present life, even if the incident happened 30 years ago.

What follows is an example of the 'Immediacy Transfer' from Nicole's interview. She was talking about an event that happened five years ago. When she got to this part of her story her narrative moved to the present tense. Her whole demeanour changed. I was witnessing her distress first hand as though it happened today.

> He is my excuse. I lost it. I can't go back to work. I absolutely hate it. I'm just so torn up. I'm just trying to do the right thing. I'm trying to progress in my career and it's about time I do that.

Jane's example of the 'Immediacy Transfer' shows what really got to her. What insulted her. What reached in and touched a sensitive place. The interview moves from the past tense to the present and back to the past. Highlighting the seed of disenfranchisement.

> The unit manager sits down. You are childish. You write like a three year old. I can't understand anything you write. Any task I give you is never completed.
>
> Not only did he say this to me but he wrote it in my report. That I was childish and immature, and all this sort of stuff. If any of the stuff was true um I wouldn't got a full time job, and I shouldn't have been working there for 3 years before that. And I wouldn't have every other manager and supervisor, that I worked with before give me good reports.
>
> Because basically he took a dislike to me and in his words 'I was a soft c..k'. It means I wasn't hard enough.

Carol's seed of discontent comes from a workplace that does not respect her decisions. Her narrative moves from the past tense to the present tense as her main sorry is that she does not get a say.

> So we were doing some interviews for new employees and there was one I didn't like because he had a poor education history and had failed the basic literacy and numeracy for another service. Anyway they basically told me my opinion didn't count. Which really upset me so I left and I won't be helping out any more. I mean what is the point of me being there on the interview panel if I don't get a say. It's such a sexist boys club and it's like that every day.

I have discussed the 'Immediacy Transfer' with colleagues and managers as a way to help unhappy workers. If you listen to your workers and see where their dissatisfaction lies you can solve issues. Often managers responded to the 'Immediacy Transfer' by saying, 'That is in the past'. We have to move on. That has nothing to do with this issue. Get over it. But if we really want to manage pain in a healing rather than harmful way we need to develop strategies to address the kernel of the pain.

## The I in interview

This section deals with my involvement, influence and effect on the interview process to discover if my behaviour and experience had facilitated disclosure or hindered it.

Data collection is enhanced by embracing the native experience (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). The native experience means insider research. Insider research has many benefits. As an insider, a disenfranchised public servant, I feel that my participants and I shared similar stories, felt similar pains of disenfranchisement and have common understandings. Brannick and Coghlan (2007) see insiders as acquiring an 'understanding in use' (p 66) rather than 'reconstituted understanding' (p 66). Using a special expertise into objects of study enhances the information. The insider has access to participants and pre-understanding.

Pre-understanding refers to people's knowledge, insights and experiences. The knowledge, insights and experience of the insider researcher apply not only to theoretical understanding of organisational dynamics but also to the lived experience (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). Insiders know the jargon. They know what can be talked about and what cannot. They know what is legitimate and what is taboo. The insider knows what occupies colleagues' minds. The insider researcher can show what the organisation is really like.

Much of the literature talks about the power relationship between interviewee and interviewer. At any time during the interview neither party is devoid of power. Rather power is constructed discursively between the participants (Enosh and Buchbinder, 2005). This sits well with my ethos of research. Part of the objective of telling the story was to empower the participant through giving voice to the often silenced experience.

In the past the role of the interviewer in the process of narrative production was relatively passive. It is misleading to think that the interviewer is merely the facilitator of data production. In fact the interviewer is an equal partner in the interview process. The researcher is not merely a recording machine (Enosh and Buchbinder, 2005).

The interviewer is not passive, an empty vessel. The interview process is interactive. Both the interviewer and the interviewee contribute to the outcome. Both parties are active in making meaning and constructing a version of reality through their interaction. The interviewer can motivate and shape the dynamics of the interview in partnership with the interviewee (Enosh and Buchbinder, 2005).

I take much wisdom about interviewing from domestic violence literature. Interview methodology has been widely used in this field since the 1980s. When you interview women who have suffered domestic violence there is an expectation from these women that the interviewer has knowledge of domestic violence (Campbell, Adams, Wasco, Ahrens and Sefl,

2009). Similarly, with my interviewees there was an expectation that I was well versed in the culture of the public service. As it happened, my experience and in-depth knowledge facilitated a more frank and open discussion.

There was no setting of the scene needed or defending positions. I understand that public servants need to apply for their own jobs three times and still not be approved or that people can act in a position for five years and still not be eligible to apply for it or that someone cannot be given work for years because it is not at their pay grade. This insider's view enhances the interview process.

I will note that at the beginning of my interviews I often told part of my story to get the ball rolling. After a few minutes I didn't have to tell my story because the participants were off and running. I heard machinations of the same story over and over. Being witness to the same sorts of treatment was something I wanted to shout about, tell them they were not alone and tell them it wasn't their fault. I hope the interviews were part of a healing process for some of my participants.

## Case study approach

The ethnographic case study demands that the researcher suspend premature judgement about what should be selected as data, but rather lets the issues unfold as more participants are interviewed by paying attention to subtlety, complexity and embeddedness. The ethnographic case study approach allows for a richness of details that allows the researcher to look at the values, practices, relations and identifications of people and helps explain what is going on in the world of the disenfranchised public service (Walter, 2007). The case study should be of general public interest and is nationally important, either in theoretical, policy or practical terms (Yin, 2009). This is one of the aims of my study; to highlight issues around disenfranchised workers that resonate in the halls of the public service.

Part of my hybrid methodology is to use a case study approach to explore the uniqueness and commonalities of the case study participants.

According to Stake (2006):

‘The nature of people and systems becomes more transparent during their struggles (p1)’.

I chose to study public servants because this is what I know, have lived, have suffered. Also the public service is not profit driven but should be the place where good work practices can be demonstrated as an example to other workplaces.

I want to know the experiences of the individual so I can extrapolate to the culture of the public service. I believe the experiences of the individuals at the margins can bring us to conclusions about the organisation as the whole. An organisation is profoundly affected when it is staffed with disenfranchised workers. Generalisation can be made from the stories of the few. The voices of the disenfranchised public servants, often silenced, can amplify the issues of the Australian public service in the 21st century.

Case studies provide a full and thorough knowledge of the particular and allow the listener or reader to have a vicarious experience (Stake, 1995). Case studies provide a working hypothesis that allow for the reader to make conclusions about a context (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). The reader of this study could make conclusions about the experiences of disenfranchised public servant. The reader could also make conclusions about the culture of the public service for some of its employees. The experiences of a small number of individuals can contribute to knowledge and raise awareness of the experience of working in the public service. The case study can contribute to the cumulative development of knowledge in the area of disenfranchisement of workers (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

## Chapter Three - The contest for credibility

Qualitative research and Validity

All knowledge is constructed. Validity is in the eye of the beholder. Sandberg (2000) states that ontological and epistemological assumptions that reject the existence of objective knowledge cannot establish validity in a phenomenological study by using traditional criteria based on objective ontology and epistemology.

You cannot use traditional quantifiable tools to measure the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the different facets of reality presented in this work.

There are four areas that need to be addressed in the quest for validity and the primacy of reality. These four areas are:

- The validity of me
- The validity of participants' voices
- The validity of the analysis and
- The validity of the topic itself.

In partnership with others I wish to weave an argument for validity that mirrors the complexity of my participants' stories.

Emotions are an important part of this work. Emotions should be central to the research process. In the past emotions in research have been suppressed or deemed as inappropriate because they jeopardise the rigour of the research. Quantitative research colleagues have viewed this type of research as highly emotional and subjective and therefore untrustworthy. However a fundamental aspect of our humanness is our capacity to feel and

to show emotion. It is appropriate for qualitative researchers to see their emotional and cognitive functions as inseparable (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen and Liamputtong, 2009).

Denzin (1984; x) in Dickson-Swift et al (2009) comments:

> Emotionality lies at the intersection of the person and society, for all persons are joined to their societies through the self-feelings and emotions they feel and experience on a daily basis. This is the reason the study of emotionality must occupy a central place in all the human disciplines, for to be human is to be emotional (p 61).

As qualitative researchers our goal is to see the world through someone else's eyes, using ourselves as research instruments. It therefore follows that we must experience our research both intellectually and emotionally (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009).

This work is proudly situated in all the messiness, emotion-fest, and celebration of the difference and madness of otherness. This work is often silenced because it is perceived as naïve and embarrassing, a manifestation of postmodern morbidity or a romantic celebration of schizophrenia (Olkowski, 1999).

As my participants' stories occupy the margins of the public service; so do my notions of validity occupy the margins. As the voices of disenfranchised participants are rarely heard, as they are not part of the dominant discourse; I too want to discuss the notion of validity in the margins where it is possible to disrupt, sabotage and fracture.

There are others who go before me, always challenging hegemonic views of validity. The works of Lather, Angen, Olkowski and others show alternative views on validity that better suit my work. These authors work in many fields. With my methodology I will aim to use a

hybrid notion of validity to strengthen the authenticity and realness of the knowledge generated by my analysis and discussion of the disenfranchised public servant. Feminist and post structural dialogue and narrative theories provide places for my work to percolate.

Often validity is seen as a problem in qualitative research. I see it as a place to disrupt, enrage and sabotage. 'I want to worry the hell out of validity'. I want to scratch it, break it, bewilder it. I want to wobble validity.

## Part one - The Validity of me.

I study the experiences of the disenfranchised public servant as a disenfranchised ex-public servant.

This study is situated within my personal history. I was a public servant for more than 20 years. I have witnessed and heard so many horror stories about the public service. Work has often dominated my life. I have talked, slept, eaten, public service work. I have ruined relationships over work. When work has been bad I have become obsessive about work.

I have suffered at the hands of public service bosses. I feel I have been discriminated against systemically. I was at the same level for 10 years. That is quite a feat. It is pulse optional when it comes to public service promotion. It did not matter if I did my job poorly or incompetently, worked hard or not. Everything I did was judged through the eyes of my supervisors who either liked or disliked me. I was never really treated as an individual and sometimes not even as a person. My strengths were not recognised or utilised. I have worked with some very competent and hard working people, but mostly this was not the case. Supervisor's bad behaviour was put down to stress. And this bad behaviour was passed down the chain and then spread into the workplace like cancer. Although I worked in the public service for a long time, it was a bad fit for me. I looked different, sounded different, and was different. But different in a way that was not valued let alone respected.

The healing from my public service job has been a long road. But the wound is scabbed and maybe will be healed in the fullness of time.

It is a strange but often experienced state that when work is unbearable it becomes the focus of all a person's energies. You would think if work was terrible you would try to forget it on the weekends or at night but that is impossible. The worse work is the more you think about it. Your whole identity and self-worth is caught up in work.

My participants and I are not the only ones who have experienced this phenomenon. Lutgen-Sandvik (2008) also discusses that for people who strongly identify with their jobs, experiences of mistreatment can be devastating. She also states that a crisis in the work domain negatively affects the family domain. Mistreatment at work tears asunder targeted workers' life narratives. Many of Lutgen-Sandvik participants felt that their workplace trauma had completely fractured their lives, belief in themselves, family relationships and fundamental notions of who they were in relation to the external world. Some participants felt that their self-identity was splintered to a degree that was irreparable. The workplace mistreatment trauma had become a contagion to the rest of their lives. When self-narratives are deeply disrupted, people lose their mooring and are cast adrift.

In explicitly positioning myself within the study, I provide a lens through which the study will be viewed. This personal lens is discussed in the *Ethnographic I* by Ellis (2004). She examines the role of the researcher in ethnography. Autoethnography is research that connects the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social and political (Ellis, 2004, p 16). She also explores the idea of explicitly including the researcher's story in interviews with others. Autoethnography explores the necessity and validity of including the researcher's story in the research constructs (Ellis, 2004; p 58).

There is a myth that personal feelings do not influence the research to any great extent and the final product is not tainted by the researcher's feelings. Discussing methodological issues at an abstract level reflects a pervasive and insidious discourse that equates feelings with weakness and is a barrier to good research (Wincup, 2001). My feelings and emotional attachment help facilitate heartfelt research full of passion and pain.

The experience of the researcher has an impact on the validity of the research. The interpretation and analysis can be valid when it is clearly placed within the autobiography of the researcher.

Researching in an area where you have direct experience, brings empathy, common experiences and allows the participant more freedom because they do not have to set the scene or justify or be embarrassed about their experience. Because it is shared there is more opportunity for deeper discussion and disclosure. Not being an objective observer enables greater truth to the research, the analysis and the outcomes. To find truth, your research needs to be heartfelt. There needs to be a commitment to truth. Truth is insight into experience. The heartfelt and subjective experience is part of the academic discourse. One cares so much that only the truth of the situation will be tolerated. Validity, in the guise of tests and measures, is something parading as truth. Researchers need to gain a unique insight into human experience (Martin, 2003). This unique insight is enhanced by being an insider.

Wincup (2001) states there has been a growing recognition that people need to locate themselves within their research and writing, however these ways of working are still criticised because they represent challenges to the traditional academic discourse. Inclusion of the self may lead to criticisms that one's work is not academic enough, or worse, mere self-indulgence. She also discusses the idea that you should choose a thesis topic that makes you angry, the rationale being that anger will sustain your interest during the years of individual and relatively isolated study. She believes that although subjectivity inherent in

ethnographic and emotional work is criticised, sensitivity to one's own feelings deepens understanding and enhances the creation of meaning.

*I have gone native. I am an insider. I connect to my participants on an emotional and intellectual level. I am angry. I am valid.*

## Part Two - The validity of the participants' stories

Interviews, in which the participants narrate lived experiences, hold the best potential for understanding trauma/stigma-linked identity work (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). These types of interviews provide a window for phenomenological understanding for comprehending experiences from the perspective of affected persons. I wish to understand the trauma my participants have experienced. To do this a feminist ethnography provides opportunities to delve and discuss using a framework much like Lather in her 1993 case study work with HIV-positive women. Using her 'angels' to understand the meaning of her participants' stories, and her reactions to them, provides a springboard to discuss validity and all its contradictions within a Latherian construct. Using people's stories as data puts an inevitable interpretive weight on the researcher. This weight includes the imperative that the researcher can bring validity to the participants' stories through insight and respect for the stories of others.

Lather (2007) grapples with the possibilities and limits of feminist ethnography in addressing issues to do with the crisis of representation. These discussions are useful for my research as they explore the limits of language when trying to capture not just the words, but the essence, of a person's experiences. Lather (2007) also unpacks the idea that listening and telling people's stories can contribute to struggles for social justice in the way that could be useful to the participants. I would hope that my research contributes to struggles that overcome injustice in the workplace. It was certainly soothing for my participants to know that they were not alone. As one of my participants said:

> It's important to get these stories down. To expose the monster bosses we have worked with.

Lather provides a range of methods to promote validity including catalytic validity and construct validity. 'Catalytic validity represents the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses and energises participants towards knowing reality in order to transform it' (Lather, 1993, p 68). This form of validity enhances the ethos of my research because I hope that through the telling of the participants' stories, through the establishment of a discourse I can help participants recharge, unload, become energised and realise that they are not alone. Their stories are being repeated throughout the disenfranchised underground of the public service.

Construct validity is achieved by undertaking research that is consistent with existing theories and in a way enriching these theories through the development of your own specific argument. These theories could be around workplaces or disenfranchisement or the employment contract. It is within the search for construct validity where it is asked:

How do we explain the lives of others without violating their reality (p 67)?

The idea that I could violate one of my participants' realities is a burden and a responsibility. The quest for validity is a measure to protect this reality in a way that speaks to others, not just the examiner or supervisor but peers and colleagues in this place we call work.

## Part Three – The Validity of the analysis

My research is part of the body of work that aims to legitimise the human experience through narrative analysis. Some people see qualitative research as too subjective. Subjectivity is its strength. It is through subjectivity that we come to a true understanding of the world and the ways humans interact. It is through subjective eyes that we get to the valid heart of the question.

Angen (2000) asks the question:

Should we release research from the stranglehold of validity as truth?

Validity certainly should not be left uncontested.

Have certain people, institutions, organisations procured the truth?

Truth needs to be examined not only from a hegemonic viewpoint but from a personal viewpoint. At the start of my research I wanted to analyse my data using a feminist framework. That was my background, my passion, my truth. However, through snowball sampling many men became part of the snow ball and became impossible to ignore.

My preconception was that people became disenfranchised because of gender politics, the history of the public service and the hierarchical, patriarchal nature of the organisation. To disrupt my feminist sensibilities I found that men shared the same stories of disenfranchisement. This discovery forced me to unlearn my own perspective. To relearn ways of knowing.

This relearning is closely related to the search for validity. To ensure that the lessons learnt through the experiences of my participants are legitimised. The search for validity is a quest that cannot be avoided or resolved (Lather, 1993).

Using a software application that analyses your data by identifying themes to establish validity is for me an empty and soulless endeavour. I will not legitimise my work by subjecting my participants' words to computer programs than claim to find themes but not heart. Software that will find reoccurring words but not reoccurring pain. That is why it was so important for me to not only listen to my participants but also to transcribe their interviews. This exercise made me feel an intimacy and empathy with my participants. I listened over and over to their stories, their pauses and inflections. I learnt much in the silences as well as the words. Knowledge from silences and vocal range is something a

computer program cannot do. Listening to silences with emotion and empathy allows for a deeper truth, a truer reality.

I also reject as measures of validity what Sandberg (2000) sees as objective epistemology and language as an accurate representation of the objective reality. Objectivist's epistemology stipulates that beyond human consciousness, there is an objective reality. It is not possible to produce objective descriptions of reality. The meaning of reality cannot be fixed but is fundamentally indeterminate. The reality of my participants is a world not of objective facts but of objections, rejections and contradictions.

Reality is socially constructed by the continuous negotiations between people about the very nature of that reality (Sandberg, 2000). My research certainly is situated within this paradigm. There is a unique and special negotiation that occurs when one disenfranchised public servant talks to another. This negotiation is vital in the search for shared truth and experience, where you are judged by your substance not your appearance or pay grade.

The crisis of representation through the limitation of language is an important part of my research. What is not said is as important as what is said. Due to the shared experiences of the researcher and participant there is shared understanding of the nuances of public service speak and culture. During interviews I was told, I was passed over for a job that I had acted in for eight years, when I went to an interview and they would rather appoint no one than have me. I was refused the acting opportunity; I know the depth of pain, embarrassment and crisis these experiences have on individuals not only because I have heard my participants' words but because I have experienced them myself.

What do we use to justify the knowledge produced from the research? Knowledge claims are dependent on the person who makes them. Through the art of meaning making, we use the process of presenting new insights through the data and chosen methodology. There is

no such thing as transparent narration. Narrative represents the web of structures, signs and play. This aspect of human experience cannot be understood through reductionist measures (Giorgio, 1992; Mishler, 1990 as quoted in Angen, 2000).

Is it a universal truth that when people move in their narrative from the past tense to the present tense then what they are communicating about at that juncture really matters to them the most? This trick of the subconscious manifested in language goes towards proving authenticity to people's reality. This 'discovery' has many uses. It gives the researcher a window into the participants' internal world.

> Validity, in the name of quality should not attempt to hegemonise. The efforts by the top to reject and eliminate the bottom for reasons of status bites back (Lather, 2003).

## Part Four - The Validity of the topic

Is it valid to research the experiences of disenfranchised public servants? Does this topic add to the body of knowledge around work, dignity at work and working with people who are disgruntled?

Lather (2010) has constructed touchstones of quality. Research should have some sense of history, sociology, philosophy, and ethics of inquiry. To this end I wish to explore the history, sociology, philosophy and ethics of inquiry of my study to cement the validity of the knowledge generated.

These interviews undertaken represent silenced voices and subjugated knowledge. There is little acknowledgement of the impact the organisation has on individuals' lives. I aim to explore this impact both at a sociological and philosophical level.

### Historical validity

Poor bureaucratic behaviour has been well documented for the last forty years from Crozier in 1964 with his study of French bureaucrats to Caiden in 1991 and his list of bureaupathologies. (A description of bureaupathologies is discussed in the chapter the *Personality of Tyranny*). And more recently bureaupathology has been explored by Samier and Lumby (2010), Durant, (2009) and Durant, Stazyk and Resh (2010).

The history of the disenfranchised public service enhances the validity of the knowledge I have generated through this study. The disenfranchised public servant is not a new phenomenon; however its character and machinations have evolved and the level of disenfranchisement is endemic despite claims that we are all happy in the service.

In work, conflicts which are ostensibly about one thing, for example pay, are also on a different level about respect for dignity (Sayer, 2007).

My study also holds historical validity because it has similar findings and revelations as Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik and Alberts' 2006 work. These authors state that the stories of mistreated are largely untold. My study is all about 'unmuting' the voices of those public servants. People are often dubious of the extent of pain and suffering that can be experienced by workers in the public service. Tracy, et al (2006) comment that people say;

'This is the real world, not school, and these people should just toughen up'.

'Are you sure they're not just problem employees?'

'Is it really *that bad*?'

This has been the attitude of people who have heard about my study but have not read it. It was also the attitude of some of the people on my candidature presentation panel with one of the panel members asking, 'But what if these people are just hopeless' Understanding disenfranchisement at work is important because of the cost to the individual's physical and psychological health and the cost in organisational productivity.

Tracey's et al, (2006) work undertaken 5 years ago closely mirrors my work. It provides my work with historical validity. Although 5 years is not a long time in an historical sense it is a long time in the public service where the issues of disenfranchised and abused workers seem not to have improved despite research into the area. It also emphasises the importance of continuing to give voice to those people abused and tormented in their workplace because it really is 'that bad'.

## Philosophical validity

Philosophically the instrumental and unequal characters of organisations make relations of respect and recognition, and therefore dignified employment, difficult to achieve (Sayer, 2007).

This topic can be examined in a philosophical sense by emphasising the social character of people, including vulnerability and dependence on others and our capacity for flourishing or suffering. What are the ways that we can suffer at work? Shame, stigma, humiliation, and lack of recognition; or being mistrusted or taken for granted are ways we can suffer at work (Sayer, 2007).

To have one's dignity recognised is to be treated as an end in oneself and not merely as a means to someone else's ends. We are vulnerable beings: physically, psychologically, economically and culturally dependent on others throughout our lives. Our autonomy is always fragile and dependent on how others treat us. If others treat us in an undignified manner, by refusing to acknowledge us as ends in ourselves, especially by people who can make claims on others then we may find we have to struggle to maintain our dignity in the face of this treatment. To lack dignity is also to be unable to exercise the kinds of powers we associate with flourishing human beings (Sayer, 2007).

A unique characteristic of emotions at work is, they don't end when work ends, the emotions are not bounded by the workplace. The joys and disappointments of our larger life come to work with us and emotions we experience at work follow us home (Waldron, 2009). This overspilling and inspilling is reinforced by the experiences of my participants.

There is always the risk in this type of philosophical argument that some may respond to the knowledge generated as 'value-judgements' and therefore lacking in validity. In the discussion of dignity at work there is room for rational deliberation. Well-being is just not a pure value judgement or wishful thinking but rather a mode of being with certain characteristics (Sayer, 2007).

This work leads to discussions of what it means to be mistreated at work and ways to improve the lives of public servants. This makes the topic itself valid.

## Societal validity

I wish to construct a type of validity which I call societal validity. This type of validity aims to see if my study and my analysis ring true for society. To test if this study has societal validity the following questions need to be explored.

- Does it touch people within society?
- Does it touch a chord in people from all walks of life?
- When I discuss my work do people empathise?
- Do people recognise the stories?
- Do they know others who have had similar experiences?

Whenever I get the chance to talk about my work, strangers say: My husband, my partner, my neighbour has suffered here. I include here a sample of the many emails I receive about my work.

> I am still working for the Department. I could put you in touch with a lot of damaged, under-recognised, bullied, etc people if you are interested!

> I was talking about your research with a friend the other day - she works in local council, and had a nasty experience. She would have been happy to tell you her story!!!

Lather (2010) states that validity is about deep theoretical and political issues rather than about technical issues or issues of allegiance to correct procedure. She discusses validity as messy work. The validity of my participants' stories is located in all the messiness of the subjectivity of traumatised peoples' stories. The stories of the participants provide peepholes into the public service that can lead to information about the public service as a whole. Every voice implies a wider story (Greenspan, 1998). The fact that it was easy to find twenty disenfranchised public servants to be interviewed demonstrates that it was not just one or two rogue public servants who wanted to speak but that the pool was large and

covered gender, age and grade. This shared experience adds to the trustworthiness of the data and therefore can lead to claims of validity.

Interviewing twenty disenfranchised public servants reveals the sort of data that cannot be gleaned from survey data and reports. The *State of the Services* reports (1997, 1997-98, 1998-99, 1999-00, 2000-01, 2001-02, 2002-03, 2003-04, 2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-09) see human resource problems as challenges. I am pleased to explore these challenges through the stories of the disenfranchised public servant.

Gardner (2009) sees the public service as the collective effort of thousands of workers who are working in quiet good faith. It is when this good faith is shattered that people become disenfranchised.

## Chapter Four- The nature of work – The nature of workers

This chapter will discuss the characteristics of work and workers as ways to understand why or how my participants were disenfranchised from their public service workplaces. I want to move away from the blame the victim paradigm and explore the issues surrounding the abused worker, employee abusive organisations, incivility, trust and face.

I want to discuss participants' lives at work and the organisations that they work in. I want to analyse workers' complex and sometimes contradictory behaviours. These behaviours are called the 'warp and woof' of workers' daily lives (Hodson, 2001, pg 16).

When we hold a mirror up to our profession are we proud or embarrassed to be public servants? I would suggest that there are few people among those interviewed for this study proud to be public servants because of what happened to them and the general devaluing of the public service as a career. Work often defines who we are.

Workers rarely anticipate being devastated by their workplace experiences (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). You would not expect the public service to have abusive conditions or be a chaotic workplace resulting from chronic mismanagement (Hodson, 2001).

> We live or die, rise or fall, gain or lose hope, get led or misled, discouraged or inspired – by the quality of the work that we and others do around us
>
> (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi and Damon, 2006, p X).

Organisational life, in cultures which define achievement in terms of paid employment, has a profound impact on how people define and identify themselves. Work occupies much of our lives (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). We spend hours at the office or at home thinking about work.

Improving the working life of individuals is an important and powerful endeavour. This study is important because it adds to the body of knowledge that allows people to lead a life of consequence through their work and enable people to bounce back from adversity with renewed vigour.

The experiences of individuals are an important tale to tell and workers' experiences are an important contemporary issue. There are over one million public servants in Australia. When the public service fails to provide an environment where workers can engage in high quality, socially responsible and meaningful work then a large part of the Australian workforce may become disenfranchised.

## Theory X

McGregor (1960) developed a human motivation model called Theory X. This theory had a major influence on behaviours within organisations. Theory X argues that workers are lazy and need constant managerial pressure in order for them to work. Within a Theory X framework, management believes that workers need to be closely supervised and comprehensive systems of control developed. A hierarchical structure is required with narrow span of control at each and every level. According to this theory, employees will show little ambition without an enticing incentive program and will avoid responsibility whenever they can. Theory X managers rely heavily on threat and coercion to gain their employees' compliance. Adherence to this theory leads to mistrust, highly restrictive supervision, and a punitive atmosphere. The Theory X manager tends to believe that everything must end in blaming someone. He or she thinks all prospective employees are only out for themselves. Usually these managers feel the sole purpose of the employee's interest in the job is money. They will blame the person first in most situations, without questioning whether it may be the system, policy, or lack of training that deserves the blame. A Theory X manager believes that his or her employees do not really want to work, that they would rather avoid responsibility and that it is the manager's job to structure the work and energize the employee.

Theory X has been discredited in management literature about effective organisations. However the above could be a description of many of my participants' public service workplaces.

## The abused worker

Persistently abused workers reported elevated levels of anxiety and are at a higher risk of substance abuse, depression and heart disease than non-abused workers. Long term workplace abuse is also linked to post–traumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation and suicide (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008).

Abusive supervision reduces employees' job and life satisfaction and organisational commitment. Abusive supervision increases employee resistance, emotional exhaustion and family - work conflict (Tepper, 2007). Workplaces often impinge on the well-being of workers. The well-being of my participants was fractured by their public service experiences.

The following story demonstrates this fracturing of wellbeing for Harry.

> I was getting quite sick. I was getting chest pain. All sorts of things. I go to my doctor in '06 feeling like c..p.
>
> I was 46 and there is nothing especially wrong with me. The initial diagnosis was inflammation around the heart. But all that was discounted.
>
> And they decided it was anxiety. Different doctors used different terms. But I wasn't at work at this stage. The doctor had knocked me off work.
>
> They used terms like anxiety, nervous breakdown but they finally said; this is depression. They put me on an antidepressant and sent me off to a relaxation doctor.

And Lisa who tells a similar story of depression. She perceived her manager as toxic. She believed her organisation did not care or follow procedures to ensure the very minimum 'duty of care' to their workers.

> Look it is possible that I fell through the cracks.
>
> But really it was because my new team manager was a d..khead. And really someone at Work Cover or head office should have worked out that I should have been called. Someone should have checked up to see if anyone was calling.
>
> So I spiralled into depression. I thought I would never work again.

> I got so depressed. I was invisible. I was in pain. It was just one error after the other.

And for Lyn the devastating toll on her mental health.

> It's just awful, awful. And I swore I would never let it happen again.
>
> And M told me; you can't expect that these things won't happen and you have to look after yourself.
>
> And if these things start to happen, you just have to leave. You just have to remove yourself.
>
> Where I kept fighting back.
>
> I kept saying 'you must like me, I'll work harder, I'm not a bad person'.
>
> Until I got really upset and cried and cried and ended up going to hospital.
>
> You know what I mean.

And Robyn talks about the grief of working in an area that is being downsized.

> Look it's really sad and the more I think about it, I get really despondent just being there.
>
> It's like it's a dying animal, like its being starved.
>
> And the organisation is making such clear steps to kill it.
>
> They want the units to go. But what they are doing is hurting everyone in them.

The idea that in the public service you can't expect that you will not be bullied, mistreated or demeaned is a sad indictment of the organisations that are charged with the management of the wealth, health, welfare and safety of the Australian citizen.

Abuse is not a requisite aspect of work duties and is unrelated to job demands and is consequently perceived as unwarranted. All my participants described abuse they had experienced.

Abuses of relational power are the subject of some of the most alarming, painful, sometimes chilling accounts. These workers' narratives include disloyal co-workers, disrespectful supervisors, and cold-hearted peers (Waldron, 2009). Abuses of power result from abuses of position for personal gain. These abuses result in the intolerable boss, the corrupt boss or the toxic boss (Gill and Sypher, 2009).

The following excerpt recounts the toll an intolerable boss can have on workers under his or her 'care'.

> J managed through terror.
>
> If you can't tolerate your boss it is really hard to go to work.
>
> In the public service, a manager should not have the power to wreck someone's life.
>
> How can a normal person have such hatred for a boss?
>
> J's behaviour is so reprehensible that normal people feel overwhelming rage and hatred.
>
> J describes himself as a traditional manager. That must mean incompetent and dumb. K has no respect for others who do not fit within a narrow definition of what is appropriate. He is such a j..k!

And the following discussion of the characteristics of Sally's boss.

> My boss has created a kingdom, where he is no longer ugly, where he has these young girls playing up to him and he will look after them.
>
> He no longer has a mediocre intellect. He has other people doing the work. It appears he is involved. He doesn't do anything. He doesn't make any contribution. He doesn't get involved. He doesn't cherish the work. The work doesn't bring him joy but he finds that being there he is transformed.

There are many consequences of systemic abuse of workers which impacted the organisation as a whole including lost productivity, decreased worker commitment and satisfaction, loss of positive public relations and over time an impoverished workforce

(Lutgen-Sandvik, Namie and Namie, 2009). When workers face persistent harassment and humiliation there is an increase in absenteeism.

Along with absenteeism, there is also presenteeism. Presenteeism is a direct consequence of a hostile work environment. Presenteeism is when workers attend work physically but are absent both emotionally and spiritually. Presenteeism means poor productivity from ailing workers. Presenteeism also occurs when workers who have been abused fear missing work because of what might transpire in their absence when they are not there to defend themselves. This may include rumours, work destruction or key task removal. These workers use enormous levels of energy to cope with, defend against and make sense of persistent harassment and humiliation (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006).

Given the range of damage wrought by persistent employee abuse it is crucial to discuss the organisations where this abuse occurs. It is extremely important to look at public service organisations which are also employee-abusive organisations. In employee-abusive organisations workers experience persistent emotional abuse and hostile communication they perceive as unfair, unjust and unwanted. In these organisations workers suffer heightened fear and dread. Workers become guarded, suspicious and hyper-vigilant. Employee abuse is a more crippling and devastating problem for employees and employers than all other work related stress put together (Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott, 2008).

When you discuss abusive employee organisations you move the discussion away from the individualistic to the systemic where the issue can be examined in all its complexities. This is what I have done throughout the chapters; Thwarted Potential, Scourge of Professionalism, Nature of Work, The Personality of Tyranny and More than Just Bad Behaviour. Examining abuse and tolerance of abuse, not simply in the individuals' stories but within the culture permeating the public service

A common theme in hostile workplaces is abuse of power and emotional tyranny of the weak by the powerful. Abusive supervisors configure cruelty and mistreatment as legitimate management (Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott, 2008).

What follows is an excerpt exposing cruel surveillance masquerading as performance management.

> Then you get micromanaged, people watch when you arrive, when you are sitting at your desk and when you are not. There are spies and people walking around to see who is at their desk and who is not. So you don't feel you can get up and you don't want to leave your desk.
>
> And people keep a diary. He kept a 35 page report.
>
> You know what else he did, like not only did he keep a diary of times but he also wrote stuff like, 'Lyn looks teary today. Lyn lacks concentration today'.
>
> *Did you get a copy?*
>
> Absolutely. I have a copy. I did in the end. It was devastating to read.

Abusive managers send ripples through public service organisations in waves of retaliation, revenge and cycles of aggression.

In many of the public service narratives there were examples of upper management failing to intervene when there was employee abuse. Management often blames the abused employee, sides with the abuser or frames the issue as a personal matter, for example by claiming the abuse is a personality clash. Workers infer from this that the organisation does not care about, or want to hear about worker abuse. Workers infer from this that they are of little value. These inferences contribute to the degradation of the working environment. Failure of the organisation and management to end abuse are key symbolic building blocks to a destructive working environment (Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott 2008).

Meritocracy is government policy that all recruitment and promotion is based on 'merit'. Advancement is based on individual achievement or ability and where management is selected on personal characteristics rather than on wealth, class or birth. Meritocracy works against the abused worker (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). If workers are bullied or abused then they probably deserved it, or at the very least they should have the skills to cope with it, or stop it. So for abused workers, meritocracy coupled with individualism contribute to an overpowering tendency for workplaces to blame the victim.

Wendy comments that, advancement is not based on ability or achievement, but rather on the whim of a supervisor and if your supervisor is abusive or against you, you are put in a very disadvantaged place.

> You are locked into your job for your livelihood. And you can't walk away from it. And if you apply for another position you are dependent on your immediate supervisor for a reference or it looks as though you are not competent in the job. So they put you in a position where you can't get a reference for the job. Really it is an invidious position to be in because you are locked into it.

In the public service there is a veneration of highly-placed, ambitious, promotion-oriented employees. This veneration conveys a near reverence of positional power (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). This is very true working in the public service. Hierarchy veneration leads to environments that silence subordinate workers and overemphasise supervisory voices. These elements can produce an employee-abusive organisation.

My participants' narratives are both the outcome of past abusive interactions and the material from which future interactions are organised. My participants' voices are often silenced. With this silence comes the perpetuating of the abusive environment. For them disenfranchisement becomes a taken-for-granted feature of public service life.

Lyn explains how it feels to go to an employee-abusive organisation.

> When I go to work I feel as though I'm going to day detention, fulfilling a community service order. Seriously I feel as though I'm going to day detention every day.

Individualistic explanations for worker abuse are common in the organisational literature. 'Blaming the victim' explanations successfully transmute the issue from an organisational phenomenon to an individual problem (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006). Many of my participants felt that they had caused their own disenfranchisement, or that it was their problem alone. However, because I have heard so many similar stories of disenfranchisement I can deduce that this phenomenon is not an individual problem but a systemic one.

As Wendy states:

> It's really important you get these stories down. That someone links these stories. My God, we know so many people who have suffered at the hands of monster bosses.

The subjectification of workplace experiences serves a compelling political purpose by mitigating organisational responsibility for worker harm (Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott, 2008). There is an expectation that the public service has righting mechanisms to stop abuse and that maybe in the twenty participants' experiences that this righting mechanism had failed to detect the offending party or behaviour. It is my contention that no such mechanism exists in practice. If you are disenfranchised you must take action yourself, or leave, or stay unhappy in the service.

In Gardner's (2005) work there was some expectation that employee abuse and compromised work would be relatively isolated and of short duration. This has not been the picture my participants' stories have unveiled. The public service provides a fertile ground for compromised work, mistreatment and bad behaviour to arise and thrive.

Repeated instances of disregard and disrespect are liabilities that will bankrupt the person and the organisation. Abusive behaviours create hostile, unpleasant and mean workplaces that make cooperation and consideration impossible and workdays unbearable (Gill and Sypher, 2009). Lily's thoughts highlight Gill and Sypher's (2009) findings.

> I thought a lot about this.
>
> In fact way too much.
>
> I really believed her bullying ways really set the tone for the whole place. I know she would want to be remembered for her contribution to the women's movement but in fact she left a legacy of broken and unhappy people. And when I say bullying, I mean full on, in your face, screaming and swearing.

Employee abusive organisations are always exceedingly destructive and negatively impact workers' lives. The impact is felt in workers' self esteem, physical health, cognitive functioning, occupational functioning and emotional health (Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott, 2008).

Lyn highlights how effective worker abuse is in reality attacking the core of a person's being.

> It's far more subtle than that. They don't bully you overtly. They sort of undermine your confidence in yourself. What would you call that? A pathology? Something about the culture?

Lily discusses how worker abuse made her hate herself for her inaction and perceived powerlessness.

> When it came to me I didn't hate her because of her behaviour. I knew what she was and what she did, what I couldn't stomach was my behaviour. I became this meek and mild public servant with no b…s and no voice. I mean what was she going to do me? Kill me. I hated my silence, I hated my inaction. I wouldn't let a man treat me that way but I let a woman. It made me sick both emotionally and physically.

Abuse in workplaces also negatively affects those who witness it. Lily discusses the impact of abuse.

> This woman purported to be a feminist but she was the meanest, cruellest b...h I had ever met. She would belittle, berate, scream and swear. She would single people out at meetings and really destroy them and we would look away, thankful it wasn't us. One day when there was a meeting of women's representatives, we said: when she starts, it's blood in the water. We all jump in and stop her monstering ways. Well someone must have told her because she was the sweetest, most consolatory, most reasonable person in the world.
>
> Foiled again.

Management abuse and disorganisation can generate a culture of disrespect and chaos that permeates the workplace. Co-worker conflict clearly increases with management abuse. Conflict, within group interference, sexual harassment and 'brown nosing' are all higher under abusive management. It appears that cultures of disrespect and disorganisation, initiated by management, disrupt the entire workplace (Hodson, 2001).

Employees can isolate and ostracise their co-workers. Depersonalisation and shunning are intentional ways of isolating an employee from a workplace. Depersonalisation is an intentional and active tactic whereby the abused worker is only communicated with about work. The worker is denied the status of a whole person. In contrast shunning is purposely cutting off all communication with the abused worker. This includes the silent treatment and deliberate exclusion (Sias, 2009). Many of my participants have been isolated, depersonalised and shunned. These dysfunctional workplace behaviours result in stress and anxiety in the abused workers.

## Face

A discussion of face is an important aspect in discussing workers' wellbeing. Harm to social identity occurs when people believe they are victims of interpersonal attacks that have the effect of undermining their social identity or reputation. These face threatening acts violate trust. These acts include public criticism, insults, wrongful or unfair accusations or uncivil acts that demean, degrade or demoralise. These actions violate an implicit trust about the sanctity of one's dignity and respect at work (Gill and Sypher, 2009).

Losing face was a common theme in my participants' stories. They were embarrassed or humiliated by the treatment they endured in the workplace. Doing good work feels good (Gardner, 2001). For effective organisations, supervisors and especially public service managers need to be person-centred and other-oriented in ways that protect one's own and others' face (Gill and Sypher, 2009).

Discussion of face or violations of face is a framework to look at the mistreatment of many of my participants. Face in this instance means the worker's public persona. It is about protecting the dignity of workers, both as people and workers. Saving face is so important in the workplace because all interactions are public. When workers are abused and mistreated, they lose face because of the very nature of work. The public nature of work means that not only the targeted worker is affected but all who witness the mistreatment. After the mistreatment the story is perpetuated through gossip and discussion by co-workers. Face is lost. Even when colleagues are supportive the loss of face stains the relationships that the targeted person has with co-workers and supervisors. Both internally and externally the targeted worker feels the effects of uncivility, mistreatment, neglect or abuse.

Fear, frustration and rage often appear in narratives about supervisory abuses of power. Hopeless despair or burning indignation may be the emotional reaction to repeated and

persistent misuse of power (Waldron, 2009). Because workplace encounters are excruciatingly public, workplace emotion buzzes along the communicative corridors.

Employees' 'face' needs to be understood and protected in situationally appropriate ways by public service managers. Such face-saving ways means that employees' public self-image is protected and the self-image of others is protected (Gill and Sypher, 2009). When workplace behaviours demean, demoralise and degrade then workers become disenfranchised.

## Incivility

> Oh well I have lots of serious problems in my life but it really saddens me that in these last days of my working life, because I'm sixty, I'm being treated in such a cruel and unprofessional manner.
>
> (Sally, 2011)

Incivility is another form of worker abuse that results in dysfunctional relationships and hostile working environments. As Abby describes her workplace experience.

> My lunch would get stolen. Someone would eat it. Someone would always delete my computer files on the computer system.
>
> I set up a newsletter. And I put them in everyone's pigeon hole and then someone ripped them up and put them in my pigeon hole.
>
> (Abby, 2010)

For most of us incivility is a negative issue. Whether it is a rude comment, a look, or maybe a lack of courtesy, incivility has many faces. Andersson and Pearson (2000) state, 'We have established that incivility involves acting rudely or discourteously, without regard for others, in violation of norms for respect in social interactions.' Verbal abuse, harassment, and rudeness are usually considered to be acts of incivility.

According to Gill and Sypher (2009) incivility and antisocial behaviour in the workplace are on the rise. These authors believe that incivility causes much distress to workers and leads to a dysfunctional and toxic workplace.

For example, one of my participants experienced the following rumour:

> She drinks Malibu liqueur to make her c..t taste sweet.

Everyone had heard this and she never wanted to go back to work again.

Trust in the organisation is crucial for a functional workplace. Many of my participants had low trust in their organisation. Lower levels of trust are linked to a variety of negative consequences including damaged social identities, diminished effectiveness, unhealthy organisations and unhealthy personal lives (Gill and Sypher, 2009). Also in organisations where there is low trust, workers become suspicious of motives, doubt the veracity of claims and lack confidence in colleagues and the organisation.

Exposure to persistent incivility has effects on workers. These include health issues such as stress, depression, anxiety, insomnia, poor eating habits, increased smoking and drinking. Incivility exposure may also lead to psychological issues such as low self esteem, withdrawal and depression.

Incivility may also decrease job involvement, job satisfaction and organisational commitment and increase absenteeism, tardiness, turnover and time spent worrying. When incivility is the norm, workers and the entire organisation are harmed. Incivility is insidious. When we work in an environment with incivility we are more likely to take it home and negatively impact our home lives.

When public servants distrust their public service organisation they lose confidence in their supervisors, their co-workers and themselves. They can develop a sense of futility and act in ways that negatively affect their own and the organisation's quality of life (Gill and Sypher, 2009). When workers' distrust organisations they are more than dissatisfied and suspicious; they grow cynical, angry, withdrawn, and may retaliate.

This discussion of incivility is very pertinent to the narratives of my participants.

Managing damaged relationships takes up extraordinary amounts of time and detracts from the business of the public service. Work relationships have come to form the very foundation of organisations and the contemporary embodiment of how most work gets accomplished (Ferris, Liden, Munyon, Summers, Basik and Buckley, 2009). My participants paint a picture of dysfunctional work relationships that impact on the quality and quantity of work that is produced in the public service. Hence the reputation of the lazy and incompetent public servant.

## Human Resource departments' role in public service disenfranchisement

In many of my interviews there was discussion of human resource (HR) units' practices and the destructive role HR played in many of my participants' stories. HR is so involved in so many of my participants' stories that I have called them an 'instrument of disenfranchisement'. It is the perception from my participants that HR always takes the side of management against workers despite evidence to suggest that the problem is with management rather than with the worker.

HR is facing a crisis of trust and a loss of legitimacy in the eyes of its major stakeholders (Ellem, 2005). According to many sources and the interviews undertaken the HR profession has a tarnished reputation. In an ethical workplace employees are seen as people rather than resources (Sayer, 2007).

Gardner's (2005) analogy of divided professional interests helps to deconstruct the issues around public service HR units. HR is in the condition of wearing two hats. Hats that inevitable pit key interests against one another. One hat is to look after the people in the public service: the Human Resources. The second hat is to look after the needs of the organisation which would include displacing people in restructures and guarding the organisation from litigation from disgruntled employees. Looking after the interests of both the individual and the organisation is incongruent. And as many of my participants recounted, the abused worker is the one that loses. Many of my participants talked about their experiences with the HR representatives of their public service organisations.

Roger has such rage over his treatment at the hands of his HR department. He has no trust in the processes and competencies of the people who handle his pay, his leave and the structure of his employment.

> *You would have grounds to appeal?*
>
> Yes I do, but do you know why I didn't?
>
> Because they send you out a letter.
>
> That says if you feel that the process has been unfair, you can appeal. That letter comes from the head of f..king HR. Who's been there for 20 years. Who f..ks up my pay, and f..ks up my long service.
>
> He would have just rigged it.
>
> If I would have complained he would have said: That's the way it's done. He is a f..king tool. And what happened a year and half ago they gave him the a..e.
>
> So why would I appeal to HR? To that f..king idiot.
>
> That idiot who doesn't keep any records, that blames other people.

And more stories about the impact of HR.

> Well, it's very hard. If this is human nature? To me it's very undignified. I would be full of guilt. There's nothing I can do.

> I've been to HR. And I've told them, when my position was to be advertised; How can Nancy be on the panel? She hasn't spoken to me since September.
>
> And the response was: She doesn't need to speak to you.
>
> She doesn't need to speak to you? She's my supervisor. Of course she has to speak to me.

And the HR horror continues:

> Look when I was moved to W that was like a punishment because I had made a complaint.
>
> It's a type of victimisation. Victimisation is legislated against. You just cannot do it. There is the *Protected Disclosures Act*, that's to protect Whistleblowers. And there is another section that deals with grievances in the workplace, where it is illegal to victimise the complainant.
>
> And that's exactly what happened to me. And when I told the person in HR that I'd been victimised because I'd been moved out of my workplace, he said 'How have ya?'
>
> And that's how he spoke to me 'How have ya?'
>
> I just couldn't believe I was being spoken to like that.
>
> Someone who held a HR position in the public service speaking like that.
>
> Well I started to explain it. Well there is legislation enacted by Parliament that you know, and I quoted their own policy back to them, where it is stated that you can't move the complainant blah, blah, blah. And he said; 'Oh, oh, we'll have to make inquiries'. He didn't say sorry. And they never got back to me. And they never reinstated me at S, not as though I really wanted to go back there. But in the first instance I didn't see why I had to be moved.
>
> And I wrote to the Director General about being moved and he said it was against policy, it was inappropriate; he would look into it personally. And he gave me that undertaking. And I emailed him back, like a month later, asking what was happening and he cut me off. He wouldn't return my emails. And I rang his PA and she said I couldn't speak to him.
>
> They just closed ranks on me.

Using the policies and resources of HR departments to further injure and abuse workers demonstrates that the blame the victim paradigm is a systemic characteristic of the public service.

Human resource practices are often viewed as fundamentally flawed and not able to meet the needs of the public service worker. This may be because human resource development practices were developed based on a study of men and the premise that men focused on gaining promotion step by step in only one or two departments, without any significant breaks, over their working lifetime. These traditional constructs rely on the importance of winning rounds in the competitive climb up the ladder. This is done through the help of allies, including a mentor, who is needed to navigate organisation politics and gain salary increases and promotion (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2008).

So now in the 21st century with this legacy system, no one's needs are met; neither men nor women, young or old, competent or incompetent.

## Dignity

It should be every workers' right to have their dignity and wellbeing protected in the workplace. Working with dignity is a central motivation for workers. Life demands dignity and meaningful work is essential for dignity (Hodson, 2001).

Of course, the point of employment for employees is to get an income, but it is not the only point. Their dignity also matters. Sayer (2007) states that our self-respect depends on how others treat us, particular others with whom we associate on a regular basis. The workplace is a hugely important influence on where we can live with self-respect and dignity.

Workers' views are frequently missing in discussions of the contemporary workplace. It is the settings that give behaviours and attitudes their meaning. It is important for workers to tell their own stories in their own words (Hodson, 2001). My study makes the workers'

views central to the discussion of the public service workplace. And the result is less than flattering.

Dignity is associated with seriousness and being taken seriously (Sayer, 2007). This includes being able to speak out, to be listened to and have your views taken seriously. It is important for both individuals' self respect and welfare and for the success of organisations that disagreements and criticisms can be aired. An important aspect of dignity is being allowed to disagree with others without this undermining our position or inviting contempt from others. Given the association of dignity with autonomy and treatment of people as ends in themselves, the instrumental nature of employment is critical. The very fact that we need respect and recognition of our dignity for psychological wellbeing shows our dependence on others and how they treat us.

To end this chapter on the nature of work in the public service I have taken an extract from the State of the Services Report 2008/2009.

> There was a perception gap between how positively the Senior Executive Service (SES) cohort viewed themselves as leaders and how other APS (Australian Public Service) employees perceived them. The views of the SES were more positive than the views of others (p xix).

I was incredulous when I read this. Really, to publish in the major public service report that Senior Management thought they were good managers and the rank and file did not!! This is more than a perception gap. It is perception delusion.

> Although this gap may reflect the 'distance' between SES and other APS employees, it has persisted. Employees frequently identified better communication as a way of improving APS leadership performance. Furthermore, when employees were asked about how to better position the APS for the future, they identified 'more effective leadership' and 'a culture within their agency where leaders engage with and mentor employees' as two of the top four actions (2008/09 p xix).
>
> Similarly, agencies continue to identify people management skills as an area in which leaders need to make further improvement, along with the capacity to

> steer and implement change and to think strategically (State of the Services Report 2008/2009 p xix).

The above information shows that spin is alive and well in the public service. And that talk of persistent distance, more effective leadership and better people management skills covers up the broken and abused workers stuck in the hell of a public service position.

And as one of participants answered when I asked;

> Where are these 'monster bosses' now?
>
> Well they're gone. Because when there is a review they all take secondments to avoid responsibility.

A description of the character of the public service. No care, no responsibility. We are all seconded elsewhere. And the abuse ripples throughout the organisation.

## Zest

Zest can be describes as an enthusiasm for work. Wanting to do your best work. Reaching your potential.

If organisational pain is managed, organisational zest is possible. The question is; how can the public service promote a worker's zest? Hope and optimism sustain zest. Hope and optimism was not a characteristic of my participants' stories.

Peterson, Park, Hall and Seligman (2009) undertook a survey of 9803 currently employed respondents through the Authentic Happiness website. They looked to measure zest. In their study they found clerical workers to have the least zest, the least satisfaction with work and with life in general. However at the same time, clerical workers were the most likely to regard their work as a career. Clerical workers saw their jobs as means to achieve status, power and self esteem. Peterson et al, (2009) states that efforts to improve zest, improve job satisfaction and therefore organisational success should be aimed at clerks,

rather than CEOS and managers. Much of the organisational literature focuses on managers rather than workers to improve workplaces. In my participants' worlds of work, interventions to improve zest could have saved so much pain and suffering.

Zest is important in a work environment because of its link to psychological well-being. Zest is lacking in all my participants' stories. And sometimes their psychological well-being is in danger. Many of my participants had psychological injuries. It is useful to use the participants' words for many different ideas and analysis. The following quote demonstrates the psychological harm that can be inflicted on public servants and the zest vacuum.

> Look all they needed to do was to talk to me. If they had talked to me humanely. I never threatened anyone. I tried to be cooperative. The worst I did was cry and cry and cry. And that was because of my personal psychology. I was hurt and I wanted to be a good girl. I just wanted to be a good girl. As much as I wanted to be but they never gave me the opportunity to get back.
>
> *Look it's good that you can dissect it.*
>
> No it makes me feel sad. I'm feeling. It was just so stupid and unprofessional. And once I got sick. And once I got sick that was it, they put the boot in. I was vulnerable then.
>
> *What they put the boot in when you were sick?*
>
> Yeah. It was like we can't expose you to the others. You're making too much trouble. Go and sit next to George. And George could watch me and put things in his diary.
>
> It was unkind. It was unkind and unprofessional. They would say differently. They would say they left me alone. In the end I took a lower level job.
> That was the only way I could get away.
> They would say that was an opportunity they gave me. I took a job at a lower level to get away from them. That's got to tell you something.
>
> (Lyn, 2010).

Zest is contagious (Peterson et al.,2009). And in the negative lack of zest is also contagious. The public service through the stories of my participants is characterised by a lack of zest. As Lily said about herself;

> Too much passion. There is no place for passion in the public service.

However when some of my participants left the public service they regained their zest for work, but unfortunately many of my participants are still suffering in the public service.

## Optimism

Another facet of enduring workplace disenfranchisement is loss of optimism. Despite your propensity for optimism being mistreated work certainly undermines the ability to be optimistic about you professional life which spills into your private life. Sometimes this optimism only returns when one leaves the public service. Then the possibilities begin to emerge. The public service is not an entity characterised as an optimistic workplace. With restructuring, abusive managers and a toxic culture the road to an optimistic public service seems long and difficult to achieve. Further study into what makes public servants able to maintain their optimism may provide answers to increase the resilience of workers.

## Chapter Five - The personality of tyranny

(Bullying, Ostracism and Incivilities)

*He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it*

*(Martin Luther King 1958).*

Echoes of mistreatment can affect past, present and future.

According to the *People Matters Survey of 2006* carried out by the Victorian State Services Authority over one third of employees had observed harassment or bullying within their organisation. Twenty one percent had personally experienced harassment or bullying within the twelve months prior to the survey.

Thirty-six percent of staff said they had been bullied or harassed several times a month and one-fifth of cases went unreported (Bradley and Parker, 2006). These are not small figures and without exception the twenty participants in my study have suffered at the hands of individuals within their public service organisations.

A discussion around the use of the term bullying is important. It is defined in many workplace documents such as the following from the James Cook University website.

Bullying constitutes unsolicited, offensive treatment through:

- vindictive;
- cruel;
- malicious, or
- humiliating

attempts to undermine an individual, or group. These persistently negative attacks on personal and professional performance are typically unpredictable, irrational and often unseen. Bullying normally consists of repeated behaviour.

Bullying is not:

- Legitimate and constructive advice from those with a duty to comment on an individual's academic or employment performance;
- Reasonable action by management - including lawful directions, and requirements for compliance with laws and policies; or
- Reasonable comments between employees or residents

http://www.jcu.edu.au/eo/bullying/ 5 Jan 2010

For the purposes of my study the term bullying is not adequate to describe the collective experiences of my participants. The term bullying has been overused and therefore has lost some of its impact and power. Bullying conjures up school yard antics rather than workplace offences. This is an example of the inadequacies of language to really describe an emotional and distressing state. The term bullying still needs to be used because it is understood in the community and much of the literature discusses it. Also the public service measures bullying through surveys and reports. For the purposes of this paper the term bullying will be a subset of the term mistreatment.

People are mistreated at work for many reasons. Because they are loud or quiet, competent or incompetent, sad or miserable, bright or dull, too quick or too slow, too educated or not educated enough, too articulate, not articulate enough. It does not matter how the person behaves or their characteristics. Introvert, extrovert, quiet or loud, happy or unhappy. The common denominator of all my participants is that they had been mistreated at work.

## Mobbing

Mobbing is another facet of mistreating workers in the public service. Mobbing can be defined as a malicious attempt to force a person out of the workplace through unjustified accusations, humiliation, general harassment, emotional abuse, and/or terror (Davenport.et.al. 1999, p 40). Mobbing is abusive group behaviour rather than bullying

which implies individual acts of abuse. Mobbing can be described as a deliberate campaign to exclude, punish and humiliate a targeted worker in an attempt to crush and eliminate them in the workplace (Westhues, 2002). The outcome of mobbing is the target's 'expulsion' from the workplace, causing psychological and physical injuries as well as financial distress (Davenport 1999).

A study by Shallcross, Sheehan and Ramsay (2008) with self identified victims of mobbing is similar to my study because it focuses on public servants whom have self identified as being disenfranchised. The results of mobbing are similar to that of disenfranchisement. Long term psychological damage, lost of employment and sometimes suicidal and homicidal reaction. The public service has a bubble type environment. Credence is given to malicious gossip, slander, innuendo and hearsay. The public service is small and these activities can destroy a person's professional and personal life. This sort of 'knowledge' makes it hard for a person to turn up for work.

Jane describes the mobbing experience of one of the women who worked in her male dominated public service unit.

> So she made a complaint about it and after that everyone would purposively discuss sexist jokes around her. She can't take it, she shouldn't be there.
>
> And he talked to his buddies about it and I think she said it in front of others as well. They decided that it was so stupid that she should be so sensitive about a joke. I mean it was a joke and a pretty bad joke. It wasn't as if it was particularly funny and I can't even remember what the joke is now but it was a rape joke like, the punch line was, you know, basically she deserved it.
>
> And then she made a complaint. She went off, after a long time she went off on stress because just nothing was being done.
>
> More sexist jokes and so they basically made it so hard for her. So at work they gave her every possible worst job.

> Every time she came they gave her the worst jobs to try and make her the worst position until they put her in a position where you do not get to see any other fellow officers. You just work alone because they reckon she was the problem not the rest of them. So she was just so unhappy in the end that she just left.

Carol's story also highlights the implications of mobbing.

> I was told a few times that I was emotive. And that is why we don't have woman in management because you can't make clear cut decisions. You get too emotional. I might have said something inappropriate at the time.
>
> Which probably confirmed their point that I was being overly emotive.
>
> I got pushed to the point where it was clear we couldn't make any decisions.
>
> There was no point in me being in meetings. My senior, he ended up having to go to the meetings. Because the second I suggested something they would say no.
>
> So he just threw up his arms and said this is ridiculous. Just tell me what you want to happen and I will make it happen.

Carol left her employment as many mobbing victims do despite the financial hardship because being counterproductive was more than she could bear.

Targets of mobbing tend to be trusting, cooperative, conscientious, high achievers and often loyal to their organisations (Shallcross, 2003 p58). People who different than the dominant group may be at increased risk of being target of workplace mobbing. For example women in male dominated areas. In my study it appears that certain characteristics made people more prone to mobbing including people who are;

- High achievers
- Enthusiastic (those who volunteer or take on extra work)
- Those with high integrity (won't condone theft, bullying, etc)
- Promoters of human rights, dignity and respect

- Possible whistleblowers
- Those who don't join in with the destructiveness of the in group.

It is ironic that the public service wants people with the above characteristics but mobs them when they practice their beliefs.

Mobbing is symptomatic of a destructive and toxic workplace culture. A key ingredient for public service mobbing to exist is a pervasive sense of 'permission to act aggressively' (Duffy and Sperry, 2007). This is not the public service the public deserves or expects.

## Mistreatment

The mistreater in the public service is usually not a lone wolf. When aggressive behaviour is permitted to thrive, then mistreatment increases exponentially (Debowski, 2005). Bullies breed new bullies. Bad behaviour breeds more bad behaviour. It sends a message to the community that the public service is a compromised workplace.

I believe if the people who work in the public service cannot be its champions then the community loses faith in its public service. When outsiders hear stories of bullying, harassment and mistreatment in the public service, then the fabric of society tears. The impact of mistreatment extends beyond the individual, to their families and to the community at large.

## Bureaupathologies

Poor bureaucratic behaviour has been a constant. It has been well researched over many decades. In discussing this phenomenon the term bureaupathologies is useful. Samier and Lumby (2010) describe bureaupathology as a broad range of behaviours that infect identity, mentality and professionalism.

A lengthy list drawn up by Caiden (1991) of common bureaupathologies includes:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Abuse of authority, power, position | Alienation | Arbitrariness | Arrogance |
| Bias | Blurring issues | Boondoggles | Bureaucratese |
| Busywork | Carelessness | Coercion | Complacency |
| Compulsiveness | Conflict of interest | Confusion | Conspiracy |
| Corruption | Counter-productiveness | Cowardice | Deadwood |
| Deceit and deception | Dedication to status quo | Delay | Deterioration |
| Discourtesy | Discrimination | Dogmatism | Dramaturgy |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Empire-building | Excessive social costs | Exploitation | Failure to acknowledge |
| Favouritism | Finagling | Footdragging | Fudging |
| Gattopardism | Highhandedness | Inability to learn | Inaccessibility |
| Inaction | Ignorance | Impervious to criticism | Inappropriateness |
| Incompetence | Inconvenience | Indecision (decidophobia) | Indifference |
| Indiscipline Ineptitude | Ineffectiveness | Inertia | Inferior quality |
| Inflexibility | Inhumanity | Injustice | Insensitivity |
| Insolence | Intimidation | Improper motivation | Lack of commitment |
| Lack of creativity | Lack of credibility | Lack of coordination | Lack of imagination |
| Lack of vision | Laxity | Leadership vacuums | Irrelevance |
| Irresponsibility | Malice | Meaningless work | Mediocrity |
| Mellownisation | Miscommunication | Non productivity | Obstruction |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Officiousness | Oppression | Overkill | Paperasserie |
| Paranoia | Perversity | Pointless activity | Procrastination |
| Punitive supervision | Red tape | Reluctance to delegate | Reluctance to made decisions |
| Remoteness | Ritualism | Rudeness | Secrecy |
| Self-perpetuation | Self-serving | Sloppiness | Social astigmatism |
| Soul destroying work | Stagnation | Stalling | Stonewalling |
| Sub optimisation | Sycophancy | Tail-chasing | Tampering |
| Territorial imperative | Tunnel vision | Unclear objectives | Unfairness |
| Unnecessary work conduct | Unprofessional | Unreasonableness | Usurpatory |
| Vanity | Vested interest | Vindictiveness | Waste |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Whim | Xenophobia | | |

A boondoggle is a project that wastes time and money. The term arose from a 1935 New York Times report that more than $3 million had been spent on dubious recreational activities for the jobless as part of the New Deal (Caiden, 1991).

Finagling is to obtain or achieve by indirect, usually deceitful methods: For example, finagle a day off from work.

Mellownisation is where dynamic action is replaced by dynamic inaction (Boren, 1975).

Gattopardismo is the practice where there is no firm relationship between amount of resources used and public service efficiency (Hauswirth, 2006).

Paperasserie is the excessive bureaucratic procedure or paperwork, bureaucracy and red tape (http://www.answers.com/topic/paperasserie, 2010).

Decidophobia is the fear of making decisions. The word decidophobia was first mentioned by Princeton University philosopher Walter Kaufmann in his 1973 book; *Without guilt and justice.*

Bureaupathologies are the vices, maladies and sickness of bureaucracies. It is the systemic shortcomings of organisations that cause individuals within them to be guilty of malpractices (Caiden, 1991). When there are no consequences for people's behaviour and no-one ends wrong doing then there are enormous social repercussions.

Bureaupathologies result from insecure people abusing authority to dominate and control others, directly through unfortunate personality traits or through a misuse of procedures, polices, rules and standards (Thompson, 1961, in Samier and Lumby, 2010). This definition, although coming from 1961, accurately describes the experiences of my participants and me. It adds layers and dimensions to the term bullying. It puts the blame on the perpetrator

rather than on the victim. It shows there is a deficit in the aggressor rather than the person who has suffered at their hands.

A slavish and compulsive adherence to regulations, obsessive defence of physical space and personal status, increases distance from colleagues is a way for the perpetrator to disguise anxiety about processes outside their understanding or competence (Thompson, 1961).

There is no doubt that this is an issue. There is a public service policy that dictates how many square metres you have for your work space according to your pay grade. I have witnessed people with tape measures ensuring that no staff got more that their allocated space according to their pay level. The following is from the Public Service policy on workstation space.

In many cases, less space will be required than the suggested maximum. Accurate allocation of space based on needs rather than maximum standards will contribute greatly to a more efficient and pleasant work environment.

| - | Indicative area (m2 ) | Accommodation Type |
|---|---|---|
| Workstation type 1 | 3.24 | open |
| Workstation type 2 | 4.32 | open |
| Workstation type 3 | 6.48 | open |
| Office type A | 13 | office/open |
| Office type B | 17 | office/open |

http://www.gamc.nsw.gov.au/workplace-guidelines/1_GuidelineContent/guidelines_1_09.htm

Crozier (1964), in his study of French bureaucrats, found that impersonal rules, decision centralisation, ineffective communication among hierarchical levels, peer group pressure and the development of micro politics through power relations contributed to an

organisation's dysfunction. His 1964 work could well be a study of the Australian public service today as demonstrated by my participants.

How can this be true? How can studies held twenty, thirty, forty years ago still ring true for my participants in their public servant lives, despite the rhetoric in recent years about flat management structures and empowering workers? This is generational abuse.

Participants did mention the evolution of flat management structures. Many believed that flat management structures have made their working life worse. Find below Tom's take on the new public service.

> Well I did like it up until the time of restructure. When the traditional supervisory system, the very foundations of the organisation disappeared.
>
> Like old school public services.
>
> The new public service is more result driven and not how the work gets done.
>
> Whereas under the current regime as long as the targets are met and nothing happens, no one is injured or severely damaged, damage to equipment, you can look the other way. As long as no one finds out about it you are virtually allowed to do whatever you want.
>
> The new public service is lazier and more ineffective.

Archibald (2009) discusses the increasing spans of control. This is where the numbers of workers under a certain manager are greatly increased, so to make it impossible to supervise people in any meaningful or caring way. Tom's statement about the distinct lack of management validates this idea and highlights the impact on workers.

Bureaucratisation is derived in organisational form from the collective decisions of individuals, the recruitment and support of particular personalities and this effect on new members (Weber, 1968). From my study it appears that a certain type of person can not only survive but flourish in the public service. However on contemplation, flourishing is not

the right word. From the outside these people who have long and successful public service careers sometimes appear unhappy and miserable.

Public service work can be meaningless, but like in a Russian novel, it can take over one's life, leading to lengthy working hours, loss of family life and unprecedented levels of stress. I once worked on a document for two years, and it never got signed off. I still resent it. This sort of bureaupathology really denigrates competence.

Bureaucrats who endeavour to seize control, by the insistence on receiving information to no end; lose any sense of public meaning. This behaviour moves these bureaucrats towards the catastrophic destruction of relationships with others (Grumet, 1991 and Hood, 1995). This catastrophic destruction of relationships with others can be seen in many of my participants' stories.

The following excerpt from Janelle demonstrates how the relationship between supervisor and staff can rupture when you perceive that you are treated unfairly.

> They only care about themselves.
>
> Everyone in my office, my boss and the one below her. They're very cliquey. They're friends outside of work. They gang up on people. One of them is on a power trip at the moment. She's acting manager. And she's f..king on her high horse.
>
> They get up me for doing nothing. I think they pick on me. I got into trouble for doing my job application and no one else gets into trouble and they're playing games on their computer all day.

Lisa's interview demonstrates the issues when an organisation ignores you when you have been injured on the job. It demonstrates the consequences of inhumane treatment when

only a phone call would have helped in the healing process. A small price to pay for someone's mental health and recovery.

> I was basically ignored. I was in the process of changing branches and I injured my back about a week into the new branch. And my old team manager didn't realise that my new team management wasn't taking responsibility for me.
>
> I was out for 4 months. Not one phone call. No one rang me up. Just calls from Work Cover. Where's your certificate?
>
> Now is it going from one branch to another? Falling through the cracks? I mean it is a whole system? It is supposed to work. I spiralled into depression. I thought I would never work again.

The following excerpt from Sharon illustrates the repercussions when staff think their supervisors are incompetent.

> I don't want the job but the other guy is such an incompetent, sexist d...head.
>
> Just like the guy at S. Everyone hates him and no one wants him to get the job. He is so retarded.
>
> His wife also works for the Department. He is totally illiterate. She only works one day a week and that's when we get the emails.
>
> So he only sends emails on Friday. And she goes in and closes the door and then we get the email. Does he think we are stupid? And one day I went into his office and you know when you were at school you had cue cards, like little pieces of paper were all over his desk. His wife had written them so he knew what to say in the meeting.

The following story from Sharon shows the impact a dysfunctional workplace can have on an individual. It can break down a person's mental health and their ability to cope. It spills over to every aspect of life. It also demonstrates the effect a workplace psychologist can have on an individual, hindering rather that helping the injured worker.

> That was when I was on worker's comp because they were causing me anxiety.
>
> Which they never acknowledged.

And because even though I was totally upset and really completely devastated I was still able to function. I wasn't a total retard. I could still get out of bed and you know brush my hair and clean my teeth, you know. Remember when that woman came to my house. It was so invasive. She was a psychiatrist and she came to talk to me. And because my house was tidy and I made her a cup of tea, she decided there was nothing wrong with me because I was still able to function adequately.

Why don't you come and watch me in the workplace and see how these people treat me and what they do to me and then follow me home and see how I'm affected. She came to my house after a month of not being at work, of course I felt better I hadn't been at work for a month. And because my house was tidy and I gave her a cup of tea. And she said to me: What do you do when feel stressed or under pressure and I said: I might go for a walk along the beach. She put that down that obviously I have a great life, because I walk on the beach and therefore I wasn't stressed.

The stupid b...h.

Hood (1995) further discusses this dynamic saying that dysfunctional managers often feed off this spiralling distress. He gives the example of supervisors demanding more detailed verbal and written accounts of actions and outcomes. This strategy of micromanagement is alive and well today.

Jessie's story shows the catastrophic destruction of relationships with a boss who ignores, yells and micromanages.

And he wouldn't speak. He would just walk past you and not even look at you.

And when I questioned John, he began yelling at me every single day. And I was absolutely distraught about being yelled at.

*Did you fight back though?*

I did. I went and complained to management.

And nothing happened. No, John was rewarded.

And I was continually criticised and told I wasn't doing a good job. You know.

And then there was the secretary and she was a f..king b...h too. She would come up to me and say 'You're in trouble. I just want to let you know for when you go back. John is really mad with you and he's been looking for you and can't find you'. So I would say, 'Well that's really interesting because John actually signed the papers to say I could be here'.

So if he doesn't know where I am either he's got dementia or a head injury.

And the next week the same thing.

She would ring me and say John was looking for me and he can't find you. Look, I told you last week. He signs the papers.

Harry's story shows how the actions of supervisors can really affect staff.

I got her just before Christmas 2004. We had a really good working relationship until the 10th October 2005. My boss was going to a conference in W. We had a standing invitation to attend this conference. It was about business accounts. How different countries do their statistical analysis. I found out later it was about the time her partner was having her birthday around that time. And the reason she was going, was to take her partner on a holiday. All expenses paid. First class holiday.

So we are both going to be in London at the same time. And I suggested we catch up for dinner and she was very cold about the idea. When we got back she started talking about how difficult it was and how she wanted someone in C with her. So here I was in N and the Executive Assistant was in C. And the whole dynamic of the relationship changed. I was asked to account for all my time, asked what I was doing.

*And you don't even know what caused it?*

No. Actually the day I suggested we catch up was actually her partner's birthday but she could have told me.

I had all these issues around. I was doing all this interesting stuff.

Getting good feedback from Ministers. It was really good then it turned to: You're a sack of s..t.

I don't know what was going on.

A few years later I was at a meeting in N and she treated me like long lost family.

Again Sally's story demonstrates the profound effect that managers can have on staff:

> Well my boss I believe is quite ineffective in many ways. He doesn't produce anything and he doesn't manage. So he is a complete waste of time.
>
> He has spent 20 years ingratiating himself to people in the upper echelons.

When you catastrophically destroy relationships with people what remains is alienation, anomie and insecurity, pessimism and destruction (Bozeman and Rainey, 1998, p172).

As Sharon notes:

> A rock spider in a jail is afforded more protection than a woman in the public service who has been sexually harassed.

This type of behaviour not only changes what we do, but who we are. And who can live with that? The cost of living with these emotions is high. As Rose states:

> It's like working with a trapdoor underneath you.

These were issues being grappled with in the 1960s. And now in 2011 we are having the same conversations.

In collecting my data I was shocked at the depth and width of the mistreatment. It takes many forms. They are legion. Like Clarke (2005) I heard extraordinary stories of sexual abuse, intimidation, extreme workplace bullying, unethical behaviour and incredible manipulative strategies. People experience mistreatment at work in different ways. This made me think that this phenomenon may be extrapolated to other situations of mistreatment. Tyranny becomes more effective when it targets what we value most.

> I remember clearly when I felt despair and dismay at work. The final straw: My public service supervisor told me that I was not carrying my weight and my colleagues had to carry me. I was outraged but also felt the need to check this with my colleagues to ensure I was not delusional. This was the sort of

> mistreatment that really affected me. It changed who I was. It made me pessimistic about work.
>
> (Lily, 2010)

Another practice that is evident in the data collected is supervisors claiming work done by others as their own. Clarke (2005) refers to this practice as parasitic. It is common public service practice that the writer of the work never gets the credit. Supervisors claim the work as their own.

Many of the participants experienced what is called a workplace psychopath. One of the characteristics of such a person is that they are unpredictable. One minute calm, next flying into a rage. These unpredictable and aggressive outbursts are used to keep everyone in a constant state of high anxiety. Every employee desperately hopes that they are not going to be the next target. This strategy is used to maintain control over people (Clarke, 2005).

Discussion around individual's behaviour is crucial in understanding mistreatment at work but bureaupathologies include the role of the organisation as a factor in instigating dysfunctional behaviours. Organisations play a pivotal role in the area of dysfunctional behaviour. The organisation's culture is an importance influence on individual's behaviour, especially when threat of repercussion is minimal or absent (Fleet and Griffin, 2006). This is certainly apparent in some of my participants' stories.

Cathy's experience gives us some insight into working with a workplace psychopath and the impact of an organisational culture where there are no repercussions for mistreating staff:

> *I'm interested in your boss. Is she hard to relate to?*
>
> No-one can relate to her. If she doesn't agree to what you're saying, she will put her hand up and then talk over the top of you.
>
> She rolls her eyes.

> You'll be talking to her and she'll roll her eyes. Even in a group forum, someone will be saying something to the group and she will roll her eyes.
>
> She is totally contemptuous towards us. She has made it very clear; we are not as eminent as her. She doesn't want our opinion and then she makes decisions that don't help anyone.
>
> We are all clever people, with lots of experience and with life experience. Some of us are older than her and have a lot to offer. And she talks to us as though we are five.
>
> She's so self absorbed. Her PA mows her lawns.
>
> Her direct boss is a really lovely man. And the only reports he gets are directly from her. So he is not aware of the issues and that is why I went to speak to him directly.
>
> When I initially emailed him, he said the normal policy is to go through your line manager. And I shot back, well I appreciate your candour but she's the problem. I got an email back saying: Come and see me in 15 minutes.
>
> So I spent 90 minutes talking to him about the issue.
>
> I appreciate your candour and your honesty but all the issues I'm talking about are directly related to her. And I don't feel I'm in a position to go and speak to her about it for fear of repercussions.
>
> She loves to crush people. We are not acknowledged. She is also quite manic. Her behaviour is certainly erratic ranging from letting us do our own thing then micromanaging us to an inch of our lives.
>
> She really gets involved in our lives and then backing off again. She has no appreciation or level of comfort at all with her emotions. So, if people are emotional with her, her face crinkles up.
>
> And because she's so quick and swift you're often just gob smacked at what's just come out of her mouth. The time has gone when you want to just say something and retaliate.
>
> The moments gone. She's on to the next thing.

Lily's story demonstrates that in an organisation, bad behaviour may be passed on from boss to boss to staff. The behaviour of people in senior positions certainly sets the scene for the culture of the organisation.

> Now the boss of my boss was the biggest bully I had ever met. It was like a domestic violence situation. My boss's boss would monster her and she would monster it on.
>
> I've thought a lot about this. In fact way too much. I really believed her bullying ways really set the tone for the whole place. I know she would want to be remembered for her contribution to the women's movement but in fact she left a legacy of broken and unhappy people. And when I say bullying, I mean full on in your face screaming and swearing.
>
> I know I'm going off the time line but when I left the unit after 6 years, I said; 'Alright L, I'm off now' and she didn't even look up from her papers. How despicable. I still think about that and it's been years. At least I know now what not to do.

Jane's story dramatically shows the abuses that senior management can perpetrate.

> *Senior management would tell sexist jokes?*
>
> They tell some of the worst ones. There was a senior manager who used to come in; an operations type manager and he use to walk into a room and say;
>
> 'You can't trust something that bleeds for 7 days and does not die'.

The repercussions of being mistreated at work are immense. Victims report that they have lost control over their lives. Some of the symptoms suffered by victims include panic attacks, depression, disturbed sleep, nightmares, relationship problems, confusion, disbelief, guilt, lack of trust, anger, powerlessness, flashbacks, shame embarrassment and sexual dysfunction (Clarke, 2005).

My participants have certainly suffered some and all of these symptoms.

Lily's story demonstrates how people can feel when they do not stand up for themselves and the personal cost of being mistreated at work can create.

> What was wrong with me? I had no voice, no balls. I'm a feisty person. I wouldn't let a man treat me like that. I was pathetic. And I hated myself.

In all the stories the issue of performance plays a factor. Whether that be a bosses' performance or the performance of staff. If perceived performance leads to mistreatment than it needs to be discussed. According to Ball (2003), performance in bureaucracies produces opacity rather than transparency as individuals and organisations take ever greater care in the construction and maintenance of fabrications (Ball, 2003).

In the public service people's performance encapsulates their worth and value. The person who determines this value has extraordinary power. Even though it is couched in terms of objectivity and hyper-rationality, determining one's worth through performance is a highly value laden activity, which advantages particular groups and individuals and devalues others. You cannot judge the worth of a person based on their public service performance.

To stop the disenfranchisement of public servants a more humane public service performance review process needs to be implemented.

Bureaupathologies aim to take the personal out of the work paradigm. When we don't view our colleagues, those who supervise us and those we supervise, as real people, with humanity and kindness, all myriad of sins can be perpetrated. Bureaupathologies and professionalism have been combined in the 21st century to create monsters that leave a path of people that have been psychologically, physically and emotionally scarred. This process sends ripples into the general community and makes a harsher and uncaring world.

## Some conclusions

Can bullying be cured? It is certainly not cured by bullying the bully. You can't: Bully it forward.

Offering support to those who are being mistreated is important to improve the individual's chances of retaining their strength and gaining a level of resilience. Resilience is defined as the capacity to rebound from adversity, stronger and more resourceful (Stewart and O'Donnell, 2007).

To survive mistreatment at work you need to know your enemy, know yourself and recognise the issue. It is also crucial not to keep your mistreatment a secret. Silence indicates complicit acceptance and accommodates the bully (Debowski (2009). Keeping the silence is like domestic violence and sexual abuse. Keeping silent allows for mistreatment to flourish.

It is important to build workplaces with heart. Workplaces with heart put the person first over performance. Where difference is encouraged and valued. Where mistreatment in not allowed to flourish. Where there are repercussions for human rights violations that do not entail further human rights violations. The public service should be the place for this.

## Chapter Six - The Scourge of Professionalism

Unpacking the Processional facade that leads to disenfranchisement

This chapter deals with the notion that professionalism as it is practised in the public service allows workers to be mistreated, supervisors to act in inhumane ways and the system to ignore and perpetrate these behaviours. Public service managers need to move away from being 'professional' to being humane.

Hayward's (1917) work, as quoted in Caiden (1991) looks at the criticisms of professionalism. These include professionalism as self seeking where behaviours are sought to acquire power and privilege. Also where professionalism seeks to abuse power, by being unchivalrous, tyrannical or cruel towards the weak in its care.

The problems for public service ethics begin with the evolution of professionalism in a culture of technical rationality (Adams and Balfour, 2005). In the public service there is a social construction of 'reality' that elevates rationality and professionalism as dominant norms that in turn justify injurious actions (Ghere, 2006). Typically the abstract principles such as respect for people, beneficence and justice are downplayed in favour of what is presumed to be rational and autonomous, proceeding rigorously from some point assumed to be true. In an environment based on this notion of professionalism, ethical behaviour becomes mere window dressing. Modern professionalism is characterised by moral vacuity (Adams and Balfour, 2004).

Technical and rational solutions, the cornerstones of professionalism cannot solve the messy and complex issues that go with managing people. Rationality and professionalism should be considered as especially suspect values that frequently cause injury to workers and the public (Ghere, 2006).

This phenomenon is apparent in the stories of my participants. Most people who have been a public servant have worked with people who would claim they were professional. Sometimes these professionals are characterised by a lack of feelings, lack of compassion and lack of empathy; like a robot. Only the work matters, not the people. Only the perception of their supervisor matters. Always looking up. In recent years these professionals have been to 'Emotional Intelligence' workshops. Surely understanding and acknowledging people's emotions are human qualities that do not need a workshop to determine their worth. There have been many sins committed in the name of professionalism. Professionalism should not give people the protection to bully, intimidate, to micromanage or to crush. Professionalism should not equate to uncaring, distant and emotional bankrupt people.

Most of the participants in my study had issues with their supervisors, ranging from cruel behaviour to illegal behaviour. There was a mismatch of what would be considered humane and kind treatment with the behaviour of public service managers in a professional setting. All public service employees should receive fair and compassionate treatment. This however is not a realistic expectation if you work in the public service. In fact it is the exception rather than the rule. There is a cumulative effect of workplace mistreatment to the individual. You drag your baggage from one job to another. Professionals do not necessarily protect and promote the well-being of humans (Adams and Balfour, 2004).

There is a difference between professionalism and ethical behaviour. Many of the managers did not act in a beneficent way to people in their care. Fair treatment of employees should be the cornerstone of employee relations. Fair treatment is not in the rhetoric of professional literature. Ethical behaviour is not the same as professional behaviour. Public service managers need to move away from being professional to being humane.

Bureaupathologies aim to take the personal out of the work paradigm. When we don't view our colleagues, those who supervise us and those we supervise, as real people, with

humanity and kindness, all myriad of sins can be perpetrated. Bureaupathologies and professionalism have been combined in this 21st century to create monsters that leave a path of people that have been psychologically, physically and emotionally scarred. This process sends ripples into the general community and makes a harsher and uncaring world. Or is it the harsh and uncaring world that creates the monsters in the first place? It is the nature verses nurture conundrum.

It is hard to find research that criticises professionalism because it is taken as a given that professional is the way to behave. Also professionalism means that you have a degree of control over your job. In the public service, this control is a myth. Very few public servants have control over their own labour. Even public servants who work in the field do not have this control.

Nicole's discussion of this follows.

> I often wonder about young people. You get told you are going to be doing all this important stuff and that you are going to be a professional person effectively. And you are going to be making decisions, independently. That's how I would define professional.
>
> *Autonomous?*
>
> Yes, a degree of autonomy and the ability to make a decision about areas of your own expertise. So that's what you get told, and the training I did was different than the training today. However, it was; you go in and they say 'you are the best trained people in the world'.
>
> The reality of that is, after a while, once you're gone past that period of learning skills, and coping with the job in terms of physically doing it, once you start to broaden your focus, you see the reality of things around you. And then you can see how things work in terms of the organisation. Then you realise you are doing a lot of repetitive stuff and you are working hours that are really s..t.
>
> And you essentially have no control over your own time. So everyone else makes decisions for you and you have very little control.

> So you go from having this perception that you are a professional, you have control over your own time and then you reach a point when you think no, I have no control over my time and really no control over the decisions I make.
>
> I'm just really doing a robot's job.

In my research there were many examples of mistreatment by managers. Talk around supervisors' behaviour was a major theme. Lily sees her industrial experiences as being similar to those of family violence victims.

> This boss was so difficult. It was like being in a domestic abusive relationship. We could tell by the sounds of her steps what mood she was in. Like some beaten wife waiting to see what mood her abuser was in. I am so against people bringing their moods to work. I don't think people should have to put up with their bosses' moods. It's the work place, you can't behave badly and then have make up sex or love like in an intimate relationship.
>
> I think in the workplace you need a higher code. I'm not saying that you have to be a robot. I think empathy and kindness are very important qualities for a manager but moody is so self-indulgent and destructive in the work environment.

When public servants describe their relationship with their supervisor as similar to domestic violence then there are certainly issues. Domestic violence is illegal and there are refuges for people who are victims of domestic violence. There is no such support network for public servants who have been victims of industrial and psychological violence at the workplace. There is little recognition of their pain and suffering. Like in bygone eras when domestic violence was a secret and what happened in families was meant to stay private. The abuse dished out under the guise of professionalism is silenced with the victims being labelled as lazy or incompetent or stupid or difficult. When high ranking public servants act in such a way there needs to be an examination of the culture that allows it to happen.

The following is an excerpt from Lily's interview which describes the inhumane treatment at the hands of a consummate 'professional'.

> My new boss was a young guy. He rang and tried to have meetings with me but the thought of going back to work would send me into a panic attack. This guy had no empathy. No 'emotional intelligence'. So the last conversation he rang me up and started yelling at me and telling me I would report to work tomorrow. And I said 'I will kill myself'. This was not an idle threat. I was suicidal. Death for me was a better option than turning up to work on Monday morning. And this is etched on my mind forever. He said 'That's neither here nor there. You will turn up to work on Monday'.
>
> What sort of management school did he go to? What sort of human being would say that? He was awarded the Young Professional of the Year, a year after that incident.

I would expect any humane person confronted with a suicidal person would not respond with 'That's neither here nor there'. What contempt this manager had for my participant. Only the policy mattered, only the b.m on the seat. This was a manager. The organisation had put this person in charge of personnel. For him there would be no personal in personnel.

The public service puts pressure on individuals, who want to receive promotion, to act in ways that corrupt their interaction with fellow humans. They put their professional hat on and take off their humane hats. In the public service people's performance encapsulates their worth and value. The person who determines this value has extraordinary power. Even though it is couched in terms of objectivity and hyper-rationality, determining one's worth through performance is a highly value-laden activity, which advantages particular groups and individuals and devalues others.

The following discussion with Lyn shows how destructive it is to the individual when their skills are not valued and their commitment to the organisation is discounted.

> I don't understand. When I went into the Department, I totally believed in the Department as a way for people to move forward. Be mobile. Seeing it's such a huge organisation there must be heaps of things to achieve and do. But they don't want me to do anything. They don't want me to do anything good. Or produce anything good. I mean, the more I keep my head down, the more they think it's better.
>
> I just feel that they don't want. I've always felt that they didn't value my skills and but now I know they just don't want them.
>
> I think it's very clear that they don't want anything that I have to give them. Because we are sitting there ready to give it to them. But they don't want it.
>
> My main grievance at the moment is that I can't get engaged.
>
> I trusted the system. It's just so sad. It's such a waste of resources.
>
> Personally, my psychology may be a bit weaker, I mean I cry and cry.
>
> But such a waste of goodwill and investment. We are so short on resources. But they are wasted and there is so much we could do for them. They don't let you in.

You cannot judge the worth of a person based on their public service performance. In the institutional setting there must be a conscious effort by public servants not to be seduced by technical rationality but rather operate in the full knowledge that people's personalities are not fixed but ever changing and reinvented. There needs to be a quest in the public service to recognise and understand that the public service is ideologically complex and able to accommodate a range of people and ways of knowing and doing (Quicke, 2000).

## The Professional arsenal

In many of my case studies the professional arsenal that affected my participants so adversely included  micromanagement, performance management, ignoring colleagues, the use of the Malingerer's Index, restructuring and HR policies that did not meet the needs of people but rather added to their misery. In a sort of perversion of management theory and practice these tools have been used to destroy people.

The following excerpts from Sharon's interview discuss the negative effects of putting people under performance management. It also highlights the impact that imposing psychometric tests on individuals has.

> It still really gets to me that those f..king c..ts would put me on performance management. And the criterion that gets ticked off is:
>
> Can answer phone. Can serve at the counter.
>
> That was like the worst thing they could have done. I don't care if they called me a f..king liar, lesbian. Malingerer. How dare they say I can't do the basics of the job properly? I am the most competent out of all the officers. All 300 of them. I know every policy and procedure and to cover up their mismanagement, their incompetence and the fact that I had been badly treated they had to put me down.
>
> And so they applied what is known as the Malingerer's Index. Because your results are inconsistent. You know that psychometric testing; you are supposed to be all at one end of the scale or all at the other. You don't meet those marks; they don't know what to do with you so they apply the Malingerer's Index.
>
> Yes and that was what they said about me. That I was a malingerer. Because I was deliberately trying to make myself seem worse than what it was.
>
> That is so not me.
>
> I don't understand any of it. I don't understand how they can apply those tests with significant workplace issues. What they should have done was send a spy into the workplace to see what I was saying was true. They really were incompetent f..ks. They should have sent someone in, in uniform and said: this is a new recruit, and they could have been at S for 6 months and that person could have witnessed and said, S..t. I mean I didn't even tell them everything that went on there.

The impact of micromanagement, performance management and psychometric testing seems to impede the creation of harmonious working relations. It appears that the application of such management tools creates more resentment and dysfunction in the workplace. I would assume that that is not the aim. The public service professional who uses these tools against staff adds to the disenfranchisement of workers in the public service.

Using so called 'professional behaviour' shields one from any moral responsibility for one's actions. It is the myopic focus on the administrative role and professional standards that serve to mask public servant's own contributions to people's misery. Professionals are involved in acts that dehumanise and injure fellow humans (Adams and Balfour, 2005). This occurs because the culture of the public service allows it to happen. There are no deterrents to this behaviour. Professionalism allows this type of behaviour because it can be covered with rational thinking.

The cultural dominance of rationality shapes professional norms and numbs professional bureaucrats, causing harm to others and being insensitive to injuries inflicted in pursuit of rationality (Ghere, 2006).

While individuals are not the moral slaves of organisations, the power of organisational culture and contest, to shape expectations is profound (Dubnick and O'Kelly, 2005).

Wendy's take on management discusses some of the issues that are important when you put people with technical expertise and no management expertise into jobs that need them to be very skilled with people.

> They put people in management with no management training. So you have people apply for positions who move from a technical competence into a management position. And they may be very good in the area of their technical expertise but have no skills, no training and walk into management.
>
> It's not their fault; it's a fault of the system. People are just moved up because of length of time served. And a lot of public servants go through that process. If you've been a public servant for 20 years, then you are a senior person and you deserve promotion. It's not about the inherent qualities of the job. Not what skills you have, the skills that match the job and if you haven't got them they don't give you training, they don't encourage you to get the training or try and foster good management practices.
>
> There is no management. It's management by default.

People seeking integrity in their lives will seek ways to moderate tensions between their actions and self image. The notion of professionalism serves as an ever-accessible escape route. Festinger, (1957) (as quoted in Ghere, 2006) researched the dissonance that occurs in

people when they choose to undertake actions that do not sit well with any human being. In my research there were examples of managers doing unconscionable things that had far reaching and permanent damage to the people that suffered at their hands.

Managers hold power over employees not only as direct supervisors but as the gatekeepers for future jobs. Wendy's comments on the terrible position you can find yourself in when you have to rely on a current supervisor for entrance into the next job.

> You are locked into your job for your livelihood. And you can't walk away from it. And if you apply for another position you are dependent on your immediate supervisor for a reference or it looks as though you are not competent in the job. So they put you in a position where you can't get a reference for the job. Really it is an invidious position to be in because you are locked into it.
>
> *How to do you make the public service better?*
>
> How do you make the public service better? There is no such thing as equity.
>
> And I don't care what they say about recruitment practices if they want someone in the job they'll put them in and if they don't want someone in the job they won't get it.

Making the public service a more equitable place where there are transparent procedures has been an aim of policies for the last thirty years. It would appear we are not there yet.

## Passion

Being a professional and being passionate about your job seems to be incongruous. To get the best out of people and ensure the vibrancy of the workplace, ignition of people's passion should be a priority. When you can unite people's passion and work, real differences can occur. One of the common themes in my research was that these were passionate people wanting to do an extraordinary job. The system hindered this. In fact any

strong emotion, especially passion, is viewed with suspicion, as the public service professional is 'dispassionate'. Being dispassionate makes for a two-dimensional colleague, supervisor, or peer, who cannot meet the complex messiness and intricacies of public service life.

The following excerpt from Rose's interview gives a glimpse of a passionate person's disillusionment and disenfranchisement from a system that desperately needs passionate people to carry out its important work.

> But then what started to happen because I was outspoken and I spoke my mind they really don't like managers like that. They like managers who don't have initiative or aren't capable of thinking independently because they don't cause problems. They kiss butt, they do want they're told and they don't cause problems. Whereas me being outspoken and quite passionate about client's rights. I wasn't going to be baffled by the bureaucratic bulls..t. If I had to demand something I would demand it and even though I had the reputation of getting things done and my staff absolutely loved me, from management's point of view I was a loose cannon. They didn't like that because they knew they couldn't just fob me off and shut me up.
>
> *Because there is no place for passion in the public service?*
>
> There is no place for initiative, there is no place for independent thought, there is no place for taking it upon yourself to do anything.
>
> So if you are content to just plod along and kiss as many a...s as you can, then you will probably do fine. But they don't like people with any intelligence or initiative because if you have that you can see how totally the system is being misused and it doesn't do what it says it's going to do but most people work very well with the assumption that most people are unintelligent, misinformed and have no aspirations.

What a sorry state. Not really the place of a dynamic public service looking to meet the needs of the community it is supposed to serve. And as Rose continues:

> So if you are intelligent and informed and know the system back to front and you know the OH&S Act and the Disability Act and the Intellectually Persons Act and all the Quality Frameworks that they say that they run by, when you know all that and you can throw that back in their face it scares them.

> Because they know they will be held accountable and that's why I came against a lot of opposition in my work. It was really sad, because you would think a person with those qualities would be welcomed, because they will be able to see problems and be able to facilitate changes and solutions. When you look at the qualities of people who work in disabilities, its problem-solving and being reasonable. What they put on paper about their expectations and what they put in the Quality Framework, it's never interpreted in a practical sense. As long as they have it on paper, as long as they distributed it as widely as they can, so that people think, when they pick up the brochure, wow, this department values honesty and teamwork, you know collaborative relationships. But as long as it's on paper they are doing the right thing. You walk around any Unit. You'll see that it's just not happening.
>
> And the staff, you know the staff that are really passionate they get burnt out. Because you are constantly coming up against brick walls. And staff who don't give a s..t and they are quite happy for residents to be in clothes that are torn, have faeces on the walls, never have personal care attended to, are lazy and don't give a s..t will last longer than people who genuinely care. Who come to work to make a difference, to really care for these people and not just clock on and clock off and walk away with a pay cheque.
>
> But the ludicrous thing is that the people who have the values that the department want or publicise can't work in the system.
>
> If you do have those values, if you care and take it to heart when you see these things happening you get very disillusioned. I mean I started working with the department as enthusiastic, positive caring person and walked away completely disillusioned and troubled because of the experience.

What a sad indictment of what is happening now. It is a powerful message to read that people who embody the values of the public service can't work there. If you care, want to make a difference, want to bring passion to your work these characteristics are incompatible with longevity in the public service.

Lyn's discussion below describes the new public service professional.

> There is no best fit there is only one fit. And that's to be like management. It all looks all the same. There's only one way to be. And it's not about inclusivity or diversity or modern management style. It's not about learning and growing.
>
> There are clues. I know them.

The clues are there is a certain look, a certain personality.

I think beige is a good way to describe it. It's not emotional at all. Not expressive. Understated dress, understated personality.

So reserved. Definitely no passion. I have a picture of these people walking around in my mind.

*Not people that laugh out loud?*

No that would be dreadful.

At my unit, they would comment that I had a lot of clothes. Like I wore colourful clothes. And my politics were a little far left than theirs. You know and I am a mother. And you are allowed to be away if your kids are sick. They're the conditions. So they would give me a hard time about that. They didn't like that.

Fear is a really big part of it. Fear. Huge amounts of fear. You'd go into a meeting, a manager's meeting and no-one would speak. Nobody would say anything.

*I remember a manager saying. No don't speak, I already know what you are going to say, and I already know the answer.*

Well you weren't allowed to speak in her meetings. And she wouldn't even acknowledge you in the corridor. She wouldn't speak to you. She would come into a room and only acknowledge certain people and not acknowledge you.

And self-congratulatory. They can justify any decision they make to be the right one.

It just wears me out.

This description of public service gives us an insight into employees' perceptions of the professionals in their midst.

The idea that the only way to cope with working in the public service was to disengage was a prominent theme in my study.

You have people, you have people who are disenfranchised who are still trying to do their job properly, as well as they can and often, often being utilised a lot more and so if their shift lasts 8 hours and they are kept there for 8 hours, whereas other people who honestly just don't care. They just want to be out of there. That's their way of coping with it because they don't want to put up with it anymore. So virtually they'll just come in and do their few hours and then they say I'm leaving.

My participants were damning in their descriptions of their supervisors. They built a picture that represented the worst of workplace behaviour.

## Solutions

From the discussion it would appear that there needs to be an alternative to the professional. This could be a capable, competent human being with a range of skills and life experience that can accept the differences in others. That is collaborative and gets people to play to their strengths and accepts people's weaknesses. That is socially adept. That does not judge people on their public service performance alone and remembers that people change, go through hard times, can be productive and can lose focus.

The public service manager must be a well-rounded human being. He or she should be the leader in the public service, because the responsibility of looking after the health and happiness of so many people has far reaching effects for on individuals, families and communities. Public service disenfranchisement is too great a price to pay.

## Chapter Seven - Saving money, losing souls

(Restructuring in the public service)

This is not an era of enlightenment, moving forward or greater efficiency for the public service. Rather it is the era of the displaced. A displaced public servant is someone who has lost their position but not their employment.

The public service in Australia in the last decade has been characterised by restructuring and redundancies. Attempts have been made to downsize, rightsize, privatise, marketwise, globalise, streamline, reduction in force, selective shrinkage, dehire, delayer, reengineering and rebalancing (Deepak, Guthrie, Basuil and Pandey, 2010). Restructuring and downsizing have become established concepts in the lexicons of public service organisations (Armstrong-Strassen, 2002).

The term 'restructuring' is tame in terms of what it implies for the world of work. Workers lose their jobs, survivors have increased workloads. Public service restructuring has been sold to the public as a positive business practice. Politicians talk about restructure in the promise it will be beneficial to the economy with a leaner, more efficient public service (Hirsch and De Soucey, M. 2006).

The NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet states that restructuring will help NSW Government agencies manage their workforces more effectively to meet changing priorities and to deliver high quality, cost-effective services to the people of NSW (www.dpc.nsw.gov.au).

It was not my intention to examine restructuring of the public service but six of my participants have been greatly affected by public service restructuring and the damaging practices that surround it. I need to go where the data directs me.

The literature dealing with restructuring refers to victims and survivors. Victims are those people who lose their jobs and survivors are those who keep their jobs. Survivors suffer because they feel they are stuck in a co-dependent relationship with an organisation they no longer trust (Archibald, 2009). Public servants who have lost their jobs during a restructure and remain in the organisations are labelled as displaced. These labels; victim, survivor, displaced, acknowledge that everyone who works in the restructured public service is affected.

Restructuring leads to grief and anger, fear and distrust, demotivation and disillusionment, high levels of stress, turnover among valued personnel and decreased productivity (Holzer, 2003). When the public service restructures, workers talk about job intensification, deteriorating relationships with management, job insecurity and poor morale (McDonough, 2006).

A growing number or studies have linked downsizing to more 'hardnosed' human resource management practices, bullying and violence. Part of government's legislative obligations is to safeguard the health and wellbeing of workers when undergoing restructure or downsizing. Downsizing and restructuring pose a serious risk to the physical and mental health and wellbeing of workers has thus far generated a limited response by regulators and the public service. There is virtually no generic information provision on downsizing or restructuring for workers by government departments in Australia (Quinlan, 2007). There is a plethora of information on Occupational health and safety, governance and funding but little can be found on the human repercussions of restructure. Although restructure has become a core function of public service departments.

Armstrong-Stassen (2002) undertook a three year longitudinal study on people who were declared redundant in the initial downsizing stage but remained in the organisation. During the downsizing period those who were declared redundant reported a decline of organisational trust and commitment. After three years perceived morale and levels of trust were again studied. It demonstrated that downsizing has long-term negative effects on morale and organisational trust. Organisational downsizing violates the psychological contract of job security that has traditionally characterised the public service. Psychological contracts refer to perceptions about a set of mutual obligations that link employers and employees. They are based on expectations that each party will fulfill its obligation in accordance with their implicit contracts. The "contract" suggested in the downsizing literature is an expectation on the part of employees that their contributions to the workplace will be reciprocated with a stable and positive work environment (De Meuse, Bergmann, Vanderheiden, & Roraff, 2004; Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Rousseau, 1995). Given that contracts are fundamental to employees' beliefs and experiences, violations of such contracts have important consequences for employees' work attitudes and behaviors (Robinson, 1996). Surviving employees may withdraw psychologically (e.g., reduced trust and loyalty, withholding of effort, and reduced involvement) or physically (increased absences or voluntary turnover), with negative economic consequences for the firm. People who are displaced acutely perceive that the organisation has reneged on their obligation to them.

I come to this part of the work with great sympathy and much empathy for both the victims and survivors of public service restructure. I have been witness, both during my public service working life and through this research, to the often devastating effects of restructure on those who lose their jobs, those who keep their jobs and those in between.

What follows is Robyn's story of being a displaced person. It shines a light on the real casualties of 'rightsizing'. It highlights the faults in a system that lets people be displaced for

years. Starve them of work and let them linger in a public service limbo. This is the human cost of rightsizing. I interviewed Robyn at her workplace, where she was sitting alone on a whole floor of a city office block. Not only was she displaced in the system but her displacement in terms of working space was not lost on her. It was an accumulated effect. Organisationally displaced, psychologically displaced and physically displaced. Not only displaced but misplaced.

> *How long have you been displaced.*
>
> Well how long have I been displaced? Well I was thinking 4 years but it could be 5. What are we now 2009, 2004, 2005? I think I lost my job on September 24th 2003.
>
> *How do you remember?*
>
> I had to write it down, because I had already organised to leave my relationship and I was moving on October 12th 2003. So I knew that ahead of time because I had to organise the move.
>
> And I didn't expect that I was going to be losing my job. Yes so 21st September 2003, so how long is that?
>
> Five and a half years. Five and a half years. I keep saying four and it's five and half.
>
> *It's a long time.*
>
> Five-and-a half-years. Five and a half years I've been displaced.
>
> So I'm still employed by the public service but have had no position. So don't ever let them tell you things happen quickly in the public service.

To have someone displaced for five-and-a-half years seems to be a waste of human talent and competency. The public service is a very large organisation and it would seem that there should be some opportunities for people to move around from one area of need to another. Both at a systemic level and community level having public servants, displaced for long periods of time, would seem to be a waste of the public purse, because these displaced people have no actual position or job to do. They sit and wait for meaningful work.

The following excerpts demonstrate how this individual coped psychologically and emotionally with the tragedy of being displaced.

*I remember you told me earlier you could cope with it because you could cope with dysfunctionality and violence.*

Yes.

*I think you cope with it remarkably well*.

Everyone says that.

It took 6 months to get used to the fact that I had actually lost my job. But the first six months were absolutely shocking. Because I was expecting other people to lose their job, and that I would keep mine. And I was working to the big boss.

Because there were two versions of the restructure and in the first version I was safe. The other two managers had their jobs deleted. So in the second version, what they did, they lobbied and got letters sent in and I saw no reason to do that because I thought my job was safe.

And in the second version my job was gone and their job was safe. The actual big boss summoned me to a meeting at 9am. The restructure was going up on the website at 10am. And I thought he wanted me to help him with something around the restructure but he called me in so he could tell me personally, before I saw it on the website, that my job was gone. They had to sacrifice a certain number of jobs.

I was expecting that he was going to be the big boss and I was going to be working in his office. That's was what I was expecting.

They changed it and they had to save the other jobs. And they didn't save mine.

The idea that someone can be told an hour before the announcement that they had lost their job, seems a cruel way to manage this situation. Robyn seemed grateful for this small mercy. Other people only realised they didn't have a job when they read the website. What a cruel HR device. There are no human relations in informing people through a public website that they have not got a job. This way of restructuring adds to the trauma associated with job loss.

Robyn talks about the initial shock of being displaced and is articulate about her sense of loss.

*But you did have expectations that you would get another job?*

Yes I did think so. I didn't rush. I took six months to believe it was true. So I wasn't going for any jobs in that time. And I also felt when I go for an interview I have to feel confident and I don't feel confident at the moment. So I gave it awhile.

When you are displaced, according to the policies, the organisation must supply you with meaningful work. It does seem strange that needs to be put in a policy. Surely it is an expectation of most people that when they go to their employment, they would receive work to do. Surely that is the very nature of being employed. This is not necessarily the experience or expectation of the displaced public servant. There is work, and then there is meaningful work.

The idea that public servants can be starved of work because they are displaced is an example of waste and disenfranchisement. It not only demoralises the individual but has an effect on their colleagues and peers. The displaced person is demonised, seen as lazy and uncooperative.

*Tell me about the no work. How they can give you no work?*

Well. The bosses must give you meaningful work. Now there are two things there. Work and meaningful work. Which means work at your level.

Like he shouldn't give me

*Photocopying*

Yeah right. And there were long, long periods where I was given no work to do at all. Let alone meaningless work.

*What did you do?*

I planned my renovations; I made my phone calls, I you know.

*Did anyone say to you; what are you doing?*

When I played solitaire they did and I said, I'm waiting for someone to give me work to do.

*And what did they say?*

They all went; it's not her fault. There was heaps of gossip about me because I was told about it. And people would say it's not her fault, Simon gives her no work. And people would say, boy I wish I had that job.

*But not really.*

It was incredibly provocative to play solitaire.

For the first period I liked it. For the first little bit I liked it because it was a break and then it was as boring as hell. And I was begging for work. It was incredibly soul-destroying.

Robyn uses the word soul-destroying. Begging for work seems to be an invidious position to be in. Also Robyn's story highlights how peers perceive the displaced person. It sets up a dynamic that paints the displaced person in a bad light. It limits the displaced person from maintaining harmonious working relations. The idea that she was being gossiped about in the workplace and that people were envious of her lack of work puts the blame on the displaced person. The idea that she was playing solitaire while others were working put the displaced person in a hated position. Robyn realised it was an incredibly provocative activity. Was she supposed to pretend to be busy? Being displaced is like the domestic violence analogy I used when talking about the mistreatment of individuals within the system. If you are displaced you keep it a secret. You don't overtly play Solitaire because this shines a light on the situation.

During a restructure people not only have to deal with the loss of their permanent job but also have to fight about the very nature of their work. Robyn discusses the notion of the clock on the displaced person. The clock is a restructure mechanism to measure the amount of time you can stay at your level of pay without a job. You can have salary maintenance for 12 months but if you start working at your pay grade the clock stops. In theory, if you have not secured a job after 12 months your salary drops (M2008-22 Managing Excess Employees).

The Government's commitment remains that redeployment is the principal means for managing excess employees. However, where an alternative position is not found after the 12 month retention period, as a last and unavoidable resort, an agency may make redundant an excess employee. The clock starts and stops depending on the labelling of the work being undertaken. The notion of a clock ticking away on the displaced worker adds another layer of stress and mistreatment. Especially cruel is the idea that the clock is just a threat and nothing is really achieved by it.

*Who gave you work to do. I want to get to the no work part.*

Right, alright. So when I became displaced they had to find someone who was going to be my manager. To look after me. To give me work. And that's changed a couple of times. I think RB was my supervisor. MS was my supervisor. And then SP became my supervisor. I can't remember who my supervisor was before then. But I never had any say over who it was. They're supposed to give me meaningful work to do.

There have been times when I've had meaningful work. But the problem is that there is always this pressure that at some point they are going to start the 12-month clock on you. But at the end of 12 months what they do is they don't sack you but they pay you at the level that you've been working at.

*So this hasn't happened to you in 5 and half years.*

Yes, it has. What happened was they started the 12-month clock on me. And B wrote up the duty statement for the work that I was doing and I said no. I know job analysis and if you use those words I'll be graded low. I want you to write directing, managing, expertise. All those words. And he changed it to coordinate, contribute to and those words just give you a different grade. And then it came back as 5/6. Of course. So I demanded a meeting and said: How come you've changed my job description. This is a demarcation issue.

So I was now below my grade, my salary maintenance would continue and the clock would continue.

And the clock was at the 12 month mark when I got the job for 6 months in city office.

*So the clock stopped.*

So the clock stopped and the city office started paying me and then after 6 months I came back to head office and they started paying me my regular salary. And they have never said anything about the clock again.

Now there is a new restructure and I think they are all tied up with that now. Because when I came back to H St I spoke to pay people and they said we might get a few things wrong but the first thing we always do is get you back on the payroll.

So I thought they've got me back on the payroll that's fine. So the process is really not clear. And I'm not aware of anyone who has dropped in salary. I suspect it's never actually happened and they just scare people with it. You know. So after a while I thought; I'm not going to worry about it.

Since interviewing Robyn there has been a new policy developed for the Management of Excess Employees to come into effect on the 1st August 2011. This new policy gives the restructured person only 3 months to find a job. Even the language of 'Excess Employees' is emotionally laden for the actual person who is targeted. They are excess to the 'needs' of the organisation. Even though they may have worked in the public service unit for decades they are now 'excess'. Unwanted, discarded and disenfranchised.

The new policy *M2011-11 Changes to the Management of Excess Employees; Department of Premier and Cabinet* hides the reality of what the policy actually does, which is to take jobs away from employees. The language dampens the effect of the reality for people.

The policy will help NSW Government agencies manage their workforces more effectively to meet changing priorities and to deliver high quality, cost-effective services to the people of NSW.

The new arrangements give excess employees the choice of a generous voluntary redundancy package or the opportunity to seek redeployment.The key features are:

- an end to the policy of no forced redundancies
- an immediate offer of voluntary redundancy to every employee who is declared excess
- retention of the current severance payments for voluntary redundancy
- a retention period of three calendar months for employees who do not accept the offer of voluntary redundancy
- a reduced severance payment for excess employees who decline the offer of voluntary redundancy and, subsequently, leave their employment during the retention period or are made redundant at the end of their retention period
- refocussed career transition assistance
- three months salary maintenance for excess employees redeployed to a position at a lower grade.

**Barry O'Farrell MP** Premier Issued: Department of Premier and Cabinet, Public Sector Workforce (2010)

This new policy further punishes the displaced person and make it more stressful.

As seen throughout this chapter a restructure does not make the public service workforces more effectively able to meet changing priorities and to deliver high quality,

cost-effective services to the people of NSW. Rather public service restructures makes survivors less productive, lose trust in the organisation, develop destructive workplace behaviour and leads to disenfranchisement. The conditions for the restructured worker have become worse with only three months to find another position. However, as seen in the stories of my restructured participants' stories policy rarely translates into reality on the ground and the three months may still stretch to five years in the displaced wilderness.

And this wilderness continues in Robyn's story. After her Solitaire period, some work came her way. But the punishment of the displaced person continues. The worthlessness of the displaced person's work is clear not only to the individual but her colleagues and the organisation. It is extremely hard for people to maintain any motivation, passion and loyalty when faced with the devaluing of their work and their existence.

> B gave me work that went nowhere. It was like 'Can you tell me about emerging trends in global restructuring?' And I think OK that sounds good and I'd write a paper on that and he would put it in the bin.
>
> And I thought 'Is he just trying to keep me busy?' But I think no, it was just something he thought about over breakfast and by the next day he was bored with it. So here am I spending 3 weeks doing a literature review and all of that. And then I thought, oh well, he's not going to use my work.

The idea that someone would put your work in the bin is an example of wastefulness and lack of emotional intelligence. But really it is down-right mean. What sort of person would do such a thing? Baumeister (1997) as quoted in Adams and Balfour (2004) comments that the horror of a situation is usually measured in the victim's terms. To the perpetrator it is often a very small thing. Perpetrators generally have less emotion about their acts than do victims. From the perpetrators' perspective, the act of cruelty or violence was perhaps 'not so good', but not 'evil'. Considering other factors such as prior injustices or other provocation or pressure, perpetrators can produce rationales and justifications for their heinous acts.

The perpetrators' description of the same act differs from that of victim.

In recognising where evil has been done the perspective of the victim has authority. The witness and testimony of the victim carries moral authority as well, and provides the foundation for judgments (Adams and Balfour, 2004).

People are prejudiced against people on the displaced list. They are viewed with suspicion by managers and the organisation. The displaced person is punished for being displaced. The displaced person is inconvenient and demonised. Robyn relates the sad story of her dream job.

> Finally I did apply for a job. And I said; this is my dream job.
>
> But I really misunderstood the level of [falls silent] just people don't want someone from the displaced list. They don't want displaced people.
>
> And they had actually wanted someone else for the job and they had to go through the displaced list first. The thing was I perfectly matched to the job
>
> And the interview was supposed to be a chat but it was a really serious interview and they didn't pick me and there was someone else, another displaced person, he also went for the job and didn't get it. SO I appealed. I won my appeal. So what you win, you don't win anything really. You win the opportunity to do the job for six months to demonstrate you can do it but the people who decide if you can do it are the people who didn't want you in the first place.
>
> *They didn't want you?*
>
> I cried, I cried a lot. I cried at the end. It was just. It was really setting me up to fail and I did do that job. I did that job fine. I can do an 11/12 job easily. They had to get rid of me. At the end of the day they advertised it again and appointed the person they always wanted.
>
> One of them said you are a breath of fresh air. So they were sick of the in house ways things were being done in there. But, the thing is, that was a huge risk to say that because the convenor of the panel is the person who does their performance assessment. She was the person who didn't want me so for them to sit through a performance assessment with her they had to support her. And most of them did. Most of them knew she didn't want me and they never warmed to me, they never……
>
> She wrote secret reports.

She put in the report that she ended up writing, things like; Robyn went to the blah, blah staff development and apparently she took a phone call. She left the room and took a phone call. At the staff development. So she didn't pay sufficient amount of attention.

And she went to this other staff development and she, on the break, was looking at websites for kitchen cupboards, for her kitchen.

Yeah, you know the only, the person sitting next me at that time was the clerical officer, from my workplace. So she had reported back to K that I had looked at a website and the previous comment was from another Director. So she had asked people about things like that.

So all this went to the HR Manager and I thought: Can't the HR Manager see what's happening here?

No one can withstand this sort of micromanagement. It is management bordering on harassment.

And the harassment continues.

So K calls me unprofessional and unethical. Yes unprofessional and unethical. She gave me a one out of five for that. Although I totally disagreed with her rating me.

I said to the HR manager 'If this is true you have to sack me now'.

And she said 'What?'

I can't be in the public service if I have the lowest score for professionalism and ethics. This has been brought to your attention you need to sack me on the spot.

But I would like to have my union representative present.

And she said 'There is no need for us to go down that track'.

And I said' Well do you believe the other comments in the report?'

And she said 'If you want to investigate the ethics that will take us down a whole another path'.

And I said 'I don't think I need to be under investigation. Are you talking investigation now?' And I said 'This is ridiculous. The whole thing is ridiculous. I don't know how you can believe anything that is written in this report. I am one of the most professional and ethical people I know. And for me to get 1 out of 5 on that suggests that you've got someone in front of you

> that does not make good judgements. Or who is just gunning for me. And I'm surprised you don't recognise that'.
>
> She just wouldn't answer.
>
> I thought; 'If you are going to accept that, if you are questioning that comment, why aren't you questioning all the other comments'. You know.
>
> And at the end of our interview when she told me I wouldn't be having my job any more she said 'I do want to tell you on a personal note, that I've always respected the dignity you've shown throughout this'.
>
> *Did that make you cry?*
>
> I felt like it, I felt like it. I think I did. I certainly had a few tears but I thought, I think she's saying that she knows that I'm telling the truth. I think she's saying that. But she's playing it, she's playing the game. They're all just playing the game. It just makes me sick.

This story of the punishment of the displaced person demonstrates how policies are used heinously to destroy a person's reputation and allow for managers to micromanage displaced people out of the jobs within their units. There really is no sense of justice; of allowing people time to settle in and work to their strengths. It is rather, 'I have 6 months to get rid of this person so I can appoint the person I really want'.

Robyn's description of the report written about her follows. It demonstrates the ruthlessness of managers in rating people. It also is an example of where the system is used to do harm to others.

> And one of the complaints about me was I didn't say hello.
>
> Look I can show you the report. It's just disgusting.
>
> My workmate, who didn't like me, would come in and say in future when you make arrangements I would prefer it if you included me.
>
> And I said, thank you for your suggestion, but I left it up to them and they didn't include you and they didn't say anything about you so I was unaware that that was the process.

And then she said I need to let you know and I said 'OK you've let me know'. And then she went on and on. And I said You've let me know. I've heard you. I don't want to discuss it anymore'.

And so she stormed out of my office and went and told K and then K writes up that I had this altercation.

It was just unbelievable.

They would say Robyn gets here at 9. 40 so we have to have our staff meeting at 10 am, when half the day is gone by then.

Rather than 'I'm a new member, what time suits you for meetings?'

'Oh she has to take her kids to school'.

When I first got there, about a week later my kids had chicken pox, so I had to take them out of school and be home with them.

And they said it was unfortunate that your children got chicken pox and you were unable to be at work. I just thought;

Unfortunate for whom? For them?

You know I'm a bit worried about their health.

Robyn's experience shows a lack of empathy and compassion from managers and colleagues. It is an example of a hostile working environment. It demonstrates the level of hostility showed to people on the displaced list. They are viewed as inconvenient, deviant and officers to be avoided.

It is important to remember that displacement may have nothing to do with ability. It is a stereo-type to think that people on the displaced list are incompetent or lazy, and somehow it is their fault that they have lost their job and are displaced. This suspicion is magnified when people have been displaced for a long period of time. Years even. The following final comments from Robyn paint a picture of self doubt that comes from being displaced.

No, no. I mean, thank God G spoke to me when he displaced me.

Because I would have thought it was me.

> I've worked with you for 6 years as your Quality Manager, I thought you liked me. I thought you thought my work was good. You've sent me Christmas cards saying so.
>
> How did this happen? Was I wrong?
>
> So him telling me personally and telling me that it was nothing to do with you, not about the individual or the work; that meant so much to me.

It is an example of mistreatment to let a public servant be displaced for five years. Waiting for meaning work; waiting for a job; waiting for a supervisor. Waiting for the clock to start; waiting for the clock to stop; just waiting.

The restructure that Robyn was part of was named '*Moving Forward to the 21st Century'.* This sort of spin underestimates the impact that restructures have on people. There was no moving forward for Robyn but rather falling under, being passed over and losing ground.

Like Robyn, Wendy has been deeply affected by public service restructuring.

> There was a restructure.
>
> So there was a total spill and fill. Every one lost their job and then had to reapply at the same level, before they could apply for a promotion position. 400 to 500 people lost their jobs. And all those people had to apply for a position before they went for a promotional position.

Spill and fill is a restructuring strategy where all members of a unit or section must reapply for their own jobs. Spill and fill seems to be a waste of public money. Spill and fill seems such a blunt instrument in trying to implement the complexities of a restructure. Making 400 to 500 people lose their jobs is a hit no organisation can weather.

Wendy's experiences of restructure show how complex restructuring rules are meant to be. It also demonstrates that the veil of process is easily pierced to reveal the chaos underneath. Restructuring becomes the work of the public service rather than work that

benefits the public. Wendy's story highlight the hours, weeks and years dedicated to working on the restructure. It shows how the damage of the restructuring continues well after the dust has settled.

> So AB was seconded into the State Office but she wasn't in a substantive position. She wasn't eligible to apply for any of the jobs.
>
> So in round one it went around and we all applied for our own jobs at the same level that our position was at.
>
> So I went for 2 positions. So I was offered both positions.
>
> Absolutely. It was the third time I had applied. It was third time. And in the end I said I don't want to apply again. You've got my last two applications, you should be able to take it out and put it back in.
>
> So, anyway I applied.

The idea that public servants must apply for a job three times does seem to detract from the core business of government. Wendy was not the only participant who had to apply for similar jobs over and over again. Internal recruitment in a restructure takes up the time and energy of workers, HR and management. In fact it would appear that in a restructure there is a recruitment fest where an extraordinary amount of time is used in preparing applications, going for interviews, convening panels, working out who is eligible and who is not. If the aim of a restructure is to improve efficiencies then Wendy's story shows that efficiencies are far from achieved.

> Then the next position came up which was a promotion position.
>
> And AB wanted that job and she applied for it. She was thrown out of it in the first round because she wasn't in the pool of eligible people. The union fought her case and she was reinstated into that job. No-one was eligible except AB. So she went into that job.
>
> Then we were both interviewed and it took a long time for that job to be appointed. And I found out and I was told someone had been appointed to the position and it wasn't me and I hadn't been told who it was.
>
> And AB came around the corner and I said have you heard someone has been appointed to the job. And she said 'No' and she denied all knowledge of it. She was the one who had been offered the job.
>
> And she had been told not to tell me.

So I then found out later that AB had been appointed. And I wasn't happy.

This highlights the preoccupation of people in a restructure on who has and has not received the positions. It is a breeding ground for malcontent.

But at that point I was thinking 'Oh well, that's fine'. Then somebody, it was J actually; she found a copy of a document in a common printer. She found a copy of AB's application that had been printed off, and gave it to me.

What AB had done was gone to my computer after I had left work and plagiarised my job application for the first job. And she had taken pages, paragraphs, job descriptions; she had competencies. She had the lot. She had lifted the whole thing and just put it into her job application. It was the same job and no one in that process had picked it up. Identical applications for part of the process.

So I just went hysterical. She wasn't eligible and

*She got your job with your application*

So I appealed the process.

That's the only thing you can do. Appeal the process. PB, out in the field, appealed the process at the same time. He appealed on the grounds that he was not eligible to apply for the job, so why was she? She was working at the same level as him. She was eligible to apply for the job

*And he wasn't.*

So we won that round.

We won it? Well we didn't win it. At the first hearing of the Commission, they were astounded that she actually got in.

There was a hearing, what were they called. The Appeals Hearing.

Well to the lead up to the Appeals Tribunal, AB didn't want me to appeal. No-one wanted me to appeal.

*Of course no-one wanted you to appeal.*

It's ridiculous.

Everyone tried really hard for me to drop the appeal. But I was so incensed that she used my material.

And that they seemed to think that it was OK. And then had awarded her the job. And when we went to the Appeals Tribunal for the first round they couldn't understand how that process had happened.

By the second hearing, someone who was a lawyer was on that Tribunal and she argued the case that in the Public Service you couldn't discriminate against a person, you couldn't deny them access to promotion.

So for everyone else it was blocked but not for AB. It was awarded in her favour.

And then when we looked at the plagiarism stuff. Someone swung around. I talked to the union and they were right behind me in the beginning and they swung around in defence of AB.

I don't know what happened. What when on there, but they changed their tack and they said to me that they, they wouldn't return my calls. They wouldn't support me at all.

And then when we went to the second hearing of the tribunal, PB had pulled out by then. They had got to him.

Keeping your job is serious business. I was sleeping in a bed, and the bedroom window went out onto the pavement. And my bed was against it. I had people on the other side harassing me with sexual innuendoes and I had to call the police. That only happened in the lead up to the hearing, to the Tribunal hearing.

*Do you think it was part of the intimidation?*

I think it was AB's husband.

And that was just before the hearing. And when I went into the hearing they said that AB could be considered. I can't remember the words now, but they said she could be considered because she was being really innovative and clever by using my job application and weren't we all given time to work through that whole process of putting together job applications and we had collectively put our jobs applications together.

And I said 'How could she do that when I applied for the first job'. This was part of my application for a job that I had secured before I went for the next job.

So they then upheld her in the position, which meant she was now my boss.

And after that she would not do anything for me at all. She would not even sign my leave form.

The rules and policies around restructure appear to be written in the sand. When people are not treated fairly or have the perception of not being treated fairly, a hostile environment is created. If workers feel they have not be given natural justice it is very hard to remain resilient.

The working environment and damaged working relations that emerged from Wendy's restructuring experience make the workplace untenable. When people have to work together after they have waged war upon each other, bad-mouthed each other, placed grievances against each other - this is a position very difficult to bounce back from. The working environment is forever damaged. Reputations are ruined and everyone is left bitter and demoralised.

The cost of restructure in human costs, financial costs, time costs and future workplace costs seems too high a price to pay for savings in the short term.

What follows is another restructure story from Lily that looks at the fiasco of public servants' applying for their own jobs and not getting them.

> This is one of my favourite interview stories. During a restructure I had to go for my own job. Yes that's right my own job. I had worked in it for four years. No problems, everything going well.
>
> Well I thought I'll get my own job.
>
> I didn't.
>
> I couldn't even get my own job. Well you might thing you must be incompetent. I have to tell you that incompetence has nothing to do with promotion in the public service. It doesn't matter what the rhetoric says, if they don't want to give you the job they can find ways not too.
>
> Once I went for a job no-one else went for. I thought: Well that's pretty good odds. I didn't get it. They would rather have no-one than have me.
>
> No one can take that type of rejection.

Getting and keeping jobs is very serious business. Sometimes you can't even secure your own job, even when no-one else wants it. Recruitment in the public service, especially during a restructure seems to be a flawed process. Despite all the policies that surround it, giving it the appearance of transparency, Public service recruitment is a strategy that can be used to punish, disenfranchise and 'other'.

Archibald (2009), states that downsizing has usually been unnecessary and has actually lessened an organisation's productivity, as well as physically devastating the surviving employees. Even research that looks for the silver lining has to admit that downsizing decreases the trust of the vast majority of workers. Also that anger and other negative emotions far outweigh the positive ones.

Restructures in many public service areas seem shambolic to say the least. Many of my participants have been scarred by their restructuring experiences. It would seen that restructures cause harm, not only to the people involved but the organisation has a whole.

Some management issues appear to receive a disproportionate amount of academic research relative to the magnitude, importance, or prevalence of the phenomena in the "real world." This is clearly not the case with downsizing research. Although research on downsizing is growing, it is still dwarfed by the magnitude of this phenomenon in the public service (Deepak, 2010). A restructured public service facilitates an environment where it is acceptable to monster, mob and malign.

## Chapter Eight - Thwarted potential

It's not about getting the best out of people. It's not even about basic human dignity.

Cathy 2009

And in some ways having outstanding competence is a barrier to you.

Sharon 2010

She loves to crush people. We are not acknowledged.

Cathy, 2010

When workers feel that their workplace environment does not allow them to do 'good work' then workers just survive in a demoralised, half-hearted mode with no motivation except a pay cheque (Gardner, et al., 2006). This is thwarted potential.

Many of my participants had their potential thwarted while working in the public service.

Most people have more aspirations for their work than just earning a living. Most people want to accomplish something important in their work, take pride in doing their jobs well. In short be able to tap into their potential (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi and Damon, 2006).

When workers have their potential thwarted they feel they cannot accomplish something that really matters, that something of consequence happens when they go to work each day. This rings true for many of the public servants in my study. The motivation for people joining the public service are of course multi-faceted. The public service draws people because they perceive that their job is designed to promote the public interest and public welfare, which is a reward in itself. It is what distinguishes public service rewards from those of higher pay, better career prospects and higher prestige private service jobs. There is an implicit assumption that public service jobs are aimed at providing help, support and

assistance in the name of the general interest and well-being of society at large rather than seeking a profit or personal advantage( Cerase and Farniella, 2009).

If this assumption holds, public service jobs are more likely to be sought and better performed by people who are moved primarily by notions of social justice, rather than self-interest.

When workers have their potential thwarted they are neither proud of their work or the workers they have become. They don't feel they are improving society or enabling social justice. As Rose explains:

> Staff who don't give a s..t will last longer than people who genuinely care. Who come to work to make a difference, to really care for these people and not just clock on and clock off and walk away with a pay cheque. But the ludicrous thing is that the people who have the values that the department wants or publicise cannot work in the system.
>
> If you do have those values, because if you care and take it to heart when you see these things happening you get very disillusioned. I mean I started working with the department as an enthusiastic, positive, caring person and walked away completely disillusioned and troubled because of the experience.

The stories of my participants suggest that the public service has developed cultures that do not allow workers to live an admirable life or a life of consequence through their work (Gardner, et al, 2006).

Lyn's heartfelt comments demonstrate the pain workers feel when they cannot contribute to the best of their abilities.

> It's just so sad. It's such a waste of resources. Personally, my psychology may be a bit weaker. I mean I cry and cry. But it's such a waste of goodwill and investment. We are so short on resources. But they are wasted and there is so much we could do for them. They don't let you in.

This is thwarted potential.

## The cost of thwarted potential

The costs are great. There is an economic cost to the community, a social cost to the individual and their circle of family and friends and a psychological cost to the public servant and their colleagues. As Lyn states:

> Wasted energy. Wasted goodwill. Wasted commitment. Wasted investment.

**Economic cost**

When you have 100 or 1000s of public servants unengaged, unwilling or unable to do their best work then the public is not receiving a quality service for their tax dollar.

Working out the economic cost of thwarted potential in dollars is an impossible task. However, in economic terms it is the opportunity cost that really impacts. Opportunity cost in this instance is the real cost of output forgone, lost time, lost input, lost goodwill, loss of the dedicated and enthusiastic worker. The opportunity cost of workers not working to the best of their abilities. The opportunity cost of supervisors trying to manage disgruntled employees rather than concentrating on the core business of their public service units. The opportunity cost of the public not getting the best service that they could. The opportunity cost is endless and expand exponentially as the costs of thwarted potential and disenfranchisement ripple throughout Australian public service.

**The social costs.**

When you have 100 or 1000s of public servants unengaged, unwilling or unable to do their best work then society suffers. The cost affects the individual, their family, their friends, their loved ones, their acquaintances and neighbours. The social cost is determined by the effect that the thwarting of workers' potential has on society and workmates.

The social costs of thwarted potential are evident. Disenfranchisement leads to more unhappy people in the world. But the social costs are far more widespread than just the individual. The social costs of thwarted potential reach out to the family and friends of

disenfranchised public servants. The friends and family of the disenfranchised public servant suffer a type of fatigue where the unhappiness of their public service friend or family member is transferred to them through unloading and living with the affected person.

Compassion fatigue literature, including Feldman and Kaal (2007), Jar, Davis, Beck-Coon and Doebbeling (2009), usually revolves around the health profession but can be extrapolated to the friends and family of the disenfranchised public servant. Compassion Fatigue is the cumulative outcome of caring – caring too much and for too long with no end to be seen.

Many of my participants were happy to tell me their stories because they had worn out the compassionate ear of their partners or loved ones.

> My family can't listen to me anymore. I never stop talking about it. I even bore myself. Really they want to chew off their own ears because I've talked about it so much. Really it's not fair on them and it's not fair on me
> (Lily, 2010).

The partners and friends of disenfranchised public servants, who are empathetic, caring individuals, may absorb the traumatic stress of those they help. This may manifest itself both physically and mentally. The support person may feel chronically tired and irritable, dread coming home, lack joy in life, feel trapped, drink more alcohol or overeat or experience an aggravation of existing physical ailments, such as headache or body aches. Other symptoms can include cynicism, boredom, anxiety, loss of compassion and discouragement (Jar, Davis, Beck-Coon and Doebbeling, 2009). Compassion fatigue takes a toll on relationships and can leave disenfranchised public servants unhappy at work and unhappy at home, with their partners and families sharing the despair.

Friends and acquaintances of disenfranchised public servants can feel vicarious trauma. When acquaintances of traumatised individuals report negative effects, they are said to experience secondary or vicarious trauma. Vicarious trauma leads to negative world views (Feldman and Kaal, 2007).

When young people see their parents or other adults suffer at work they develop negative impressions of the world of work. This dissuades young people from joining the public service. Not a job of choice but rather a second-rate career. The younger generation seeing the public service as not a career of consequence or importance. It is the stated goal of the public service to recruit and produce the best and boldest thinkers. I would say that the rhetoric does not match the reality of public service life.

The social costs of a corrupted public service are not just the dysfunctional experiences of the public servant, but the costs to the family, the partner, the loved one, the neighbour or the client. The price is too high.

**Psychological cost.**

In Marchand, Demers and Durand (2005) research with 9,501 workers, it was found that occupation and pathogenic work organisations contribute to psychological distress. They claim that mental health problems in the workplace have reached major proportions.

All my participants had psychological issues stemming from their experiences of work. Thwarted potential resulted in depression, obsession, sickness and rage.

Lyn's story shows the devastating toll on mental health when potential is thwarted. Lyn felt undervalued, her world of work was empty. This sort of work is soul destroying.

> The worst I did was cry and cry and cry. And that was because of my personal psychology. I was hurt and I wanted to be a good girl. I just wanted to be a good girl. As much as I wanted to be but they never gave me the opportunity to get back.
>
> It makes me feel sad. It was just so stupid and unprofessional. And once I got sick. That was it. They put the boot in. I was vulnerable then.
>
> It was unkind and unprofessional.

Lyn has endured an unsatisfactory work environment for twenty years. Very few people can withstand such abuse and disappointment over a long period of time without a psychological or psychiatric cost.

> Look it's really sad and the more I think about it, I get really despondent just being there.
>
> *It's been a long process though.*
>
> It's been since 1986.It's been 20 years.
>
> Very inhumane. My psychiatrist told me that it was very cruel and unkind.

When work lands you in a psychiatric facility there has been a catastrophic disruption in the employer/employee social contract. When a public service unit so mismanages staff, that their mental health is injured, there is more than a social cost. There is also a physiological cost.

> And I swore I would never let it happen again. Where I kept fighting back. I kept saying 'You must like me, I'll work harder, I'm not a bad person. 'Until I got really upset and cried and cried and ended up going to hospital. You know what I mean.

Harry's story demonstrates what happens when work is your world and then you find yourself without prestige, or authority.

> I was 46 and there is nothing especially wrong with me. The initial diagnosis was inflammation around the heart. But all that was discounted. And they decided it was anxiety. Different doctors used different terms. But I wasn't at work at this stage. The doctor had knocked me off work.
>
> They used terms like anxiety, nervous breakdown but they finally said; this is depression. They put me on an antidepressant and sent me off to a relaxation doctor. I did a bit of cognitive behaviour theory.

Of course work is not the only place you can fulfil your potential. However when work is hell, life is hell. Life spills over into work and work spills over into life. Thwarted potential

occurs when there is a misalignment between workers' expectations and reality of the working environment. It would appear that there is a misalignment between the expectations of my participants and their workplace. My participants want to be treated in a humane way. Not bullied, ignored, harassed or abused.

Fleet (2006) describes a dysfunctional organisational culture as one that constrains individual capabilities. There still appears to be a dissonance between the fashionable rhetoric of individual empowerment, personal growth and corporate collaboration and the reality of working in the bureaucracy that relies on formal rules and procedures as control mechanisms (Halford and Leonard, 1999; Bradley and Parker, 2006).

And what comes with thwarted potential is lack of motivation, poor job satisfaction and often poor job performance. As Cathy comments when asked about is the impact of her malicious boss's actions:

> Low morale. And she's got some really great staff. Really innovative. Staff that would shine given the opportunity. But she just doesn't give them the time and acknowledgment that they deserve.

Public servant supervisors have a responsibility to enable workers to do their best work. To enable them to shine. Having the support or validation of a supervisor to reach a satisfactory level of workplace potential is not the only variable. But in the public service hierarchy it is difficult to thrive if your supervisor is not supportive. However, it is nearly impossible if your public service supervisor is abusive, incompetent or selfish. As Wendy discusses:

> If you are locked into your job for your livelihood. And you can't walk away from it. And if you apply for another position you are dependent on your immediate supervisor for a reference or it looks as though you are not competent in the job. So they put you in a position where you can't get a reference for the job. Really it is an invidious position to be in because you are locked into it.

Cathy describes a selfish boss who does not give credit where credit is due.

> She doesn't have a different focus. She's only focused on herself. And everything that we do belongs to her. Her reputation and her status.

This type of supervisor does not allow workers to reach their potential even if they want to. Cathy continues to talk about the impact of working for a supervisor who thwarts potential.

> Of course women can work together. But this workplace is dysfunctional. And the type of people we are. Nothing is too much for us. Give us another job and we will do it. Give us all your s..t and we will do it for you. We are quite subservient at one level.
>
> We are like worker bees. Like martyrs. We will do everything.
>
> I've always taken on the work of other people at the expense of myself.
>
> I'll work my a..e off to four in the morning and fall into a heap.
>
> I want to be accepted. I want to be part of the team.
>
> I want the validation. And I see it in my colleagues.

These people want to do good work, want to be a productive part of their public service team. Most workers aspire to do good work, take pride in doing something that matters, that serves society, enhances the lives of others and that is conducted in an ethical manner (Gardner, 2006). This is certainly the case of many of my participants' narratives. They yearned to do good work but were stopped by the culture, abusive organisations or unsupportive supervisors.

Cathy is looking for validation from her supervisor. Validation from supervisors is a common need in my participants' stories. When participants give up wanting supervisor validation disenfranchisement follows.

Cathy does not want much from her public service supervisor.

> She could speak to her staff with respect and acknowledge them.
>
> Acknowledge that we are all are human beings that are productive.

This is not a big ask. A supportive working atmosphere can contribute to employee's feelings of safety in their role. A pleasant work relationship with management and co-workers is likely to enhance the employees' positive perception of their work, particularly that it is important and meaningful (Taylor, 2008). In short, that you have a chance to reach your potential.

There are some individuals who may say that a pay packet is all you need for your labour. Essential qualities of the post-modern world are multi skilling, good communication skills, more democratic decision making and the ability to nurture and develop both individuals and workplace culture through the creation of shared meanings (Day, 2007). The nurturing of individuals seems to be missing in my participants' stories. The idea that supervisors would nurture the talent of my participants seems like a cruel joke. In many cases supervisors seem to do the opposite to nurturing staff. Some supervisors act in a malicious way towards their staff. For example, Cathy's summation of her boss.

> She was on a flight to Canada earlier this year. And she had a copy of the EBA agreement with her and she was highlighting all the things she could get us on. And she was commenting 'I can get so and so on that'. So she spends a lot of time conniving and working out how to trip us all up.

During this research many types of bosses emerged. This section will focus on four types of supervisors that were evident in my participants' stories.

The malicious boss that thwarts your potential; the moody boss that thwarts your potential; the incompetent boss that thwarts your potential or the hostile boss that thwarts your potential.

**The malicious boss**

The malicious boss was evident in more than one participant's story. A malicious boss tries to catch you up or micromanages you or spies on you. The malicious boss results in all your efforts being spent trying to protect yourself rather than concentrating on your work, or attending to the core business of the organisation, let alone reaching your potential at work.

The malicious boss who is looking to catch people up or micromanage does not get the best out of staff. So instead of doing your best work you are always worried: Am I in the wrong place? Will he ring me? Will he forget?

Jessie's story demonstrates the repercussions for workers with a malicious boss.

> I used to travel for work. His 'patsy' would come up to me. Jessie, you're in trouble. I just want to let you know for when you go back. Charles is really mad with you and he's been looking for you and can't find you.
>
> So I would say; well that's really interesting because Charles actually signed the papers to say I could be here. So if he doesn't know where I am either he's got dementia or a head injury.
>
> And the next week the same thing. She would ring me and say Charles was looking for me and he can't find you. Look, I told you last week. He signs the papers. It was all sort of undermining and destabilising.

**The moody boss**

The moody boss can make life hell for staff under his or her supervision. I think Lily really captures the essence of working with a moody boss.

> This boss was so difficult. It was like being in a domestic abusive relationship. We could tell by the sounds of her steps what mood she was in. Like some beaten wife waiting to see what mood her abuser was in. I am so against people bringing their moods to work. I don't think people should have to put up with their bosses moods. It's the work place, you can't behave badly and then have make up sex or love like in an intimate relationship.
>
> I think in the workplace you need a higher code. I'm not saying that you have to be a robot. I think empathy and kindness are very important qualities for a manager but moody is so self indulgent and destructive in the work environment.

A moody boss is so destabilising. Watching and waiting to see what mood your supervisor is in detracts from your ability to do your best work or even barely adequate work. Of course everyone has bad days but when a whole public service unit is on eggshells because of the

mood of a supervisor then potential is thwarted and workers become traumatised, demotivated and performing at less than their abilities.

**The Incompetent boss**

There are two types of incompetent bosses. Ones who are so obviously and extremely incompetent that we wonder how they reached their position in the first place. The other type is the supervisor who is just incompetent enough to interfere with their own best laid plans or your best laid plans to sustain stability or recreate change (Kellerman, 2004).

There are many reasons why leaders are incompetent. Some lack experience, education or expertise. Others lack drive energy or the ability to focus. Others are not clever enough, flexible enough, stable enough. All these attributes lead to situations where workers cannot do their best work. Workers cannot achieve best practice, or even barely adequate practice.

Sally has real issues trying to work with someone she perceives as incompetent.

> My boss has created a kingdom. Where he is no longer ugly, where he has these young girls playing up to him and he will look after them. He is no longer a mediocre intellect. He has other people doing the work. It appears he is involved. He doesn't do anything. He doesn't make any contribution. He doesn't get involved.
>
> He doesn't cherish the work. The work doesn't bring him joy but he finds that being there he is transformed. He can exploit his staff.

**The Hostile boss**

How can you do your best work when your boss is openly hostile? Doesn't want you, or your skills or experience. The public service is not supposed to operate on a personality basis, but claims to have clear and open guidelines that aim to be fair and equitable. Obviously not worth the paper they are written on. The hostile boss derails the real work that needs to be done. Robyn's story paints a picture of the impact that a hostile boss has on your ability to reach your potential.

> She wrote secret reports. She put in the report things like Robyn went to the a staff development and took a phone call. She left the room and took a phone call. So she didn't pay sufficient amount of attention. So she had asked people about things like that.
>
> She calls me unprofessional and unethical. Yes unprofessional and unethical. She gave me a one out of five for that.
>
> And I said 'I don't think I need to be under investigation. Are you talking investigation now?' And I said 'This is ridiculous. The whole thing is ridiculous. I don't know how you can believe anything that is written in this report. I am one of the most professional and ethical people I know. And for me to get 1 out of 5 on that suggests that you've got someone in front of you that does not make good judgements. Or who is just gunning for me. And I'm surprised you don't recognise that'. She just wouldn't answer.
>
> And one of the complaints was you didn't say hello.
>
> Look I can show you the report. It's just disgusting.

According to Keashly and Harvey (2005), in the workplace, an individual may face continuously sarcastic ridicule or scornful attitudes from supervisors. Although these verbal and nonverbal behaviours are not physical attacks or sexual assault, they can chronically torture the individual psychologically when these behaviors become constant in the workplace. Therefore, it is appropriate to describe these negative behaviors with the word abuse because such a term can discriminate itself from other hostile behaviors that involve physical contact. Besides, the word *abuse* can vividly describe the severity and long-term effects of the above negative behaviors. Another core assumption of emotional abuse proposed by Keashly and her colleagues is that studies and theories concerning emotional abuse are based on the perspective of victims. That is, emotional abuse reflects victims' subjective experiences, and therefore emotional abuse must be measured from the target's experiential perspective (Keashly & Harvey, 2005, p. 206).

The public service continues to be characterised by a hierarchical culture where information and communications are used to achieve control. Conformity and attention to technical matters are valued (Bradley and Parker, 2006). It appears there may be a misalignment between the aspirations of the modern worker and the dominant culture of the public service.

This aspirational misalignment is highlighted in Rose's comments.

> Because if you care and take it to heart, when you see these things happening, you get very disillusioned. I mean I started working as an enthusiastic, positive, caring person and walked away completely disillusioned and troubled because of the experience.

Working in the public service should not result in disillusionment and disenfranchisement or a form of post traumatic stress syndrome. Leaving troubled because of your experience is what gives the public service a bad reputation. The public service cannot have a bad reputation because society expects government to reduce crime, reduce poverty, support communities, hold society together and intervene to reduce inequality in the distribution of income (Pusey, 2003). How can this be achieved when the workers within government feel they work in dysfunctional organisations where their work is under appreciated and there are no opportunities to thrive and shine?

As with Cathy, Lyn wanted to do good work. Wanted to reach her potential. But she was told she was bad. She was not nurtured or enabled to shine. Her dismay is palpable in her words.

> They would say; I'm not performing.
>
> That wrenches my heart. Because I'm really invested in what I'm doing. And I'm incredibly invested. And I wanted to win tenders and do projects. And contribute to the strategy and make things happen for access and inclusion.
>
> But they didn't want me or anything I could do.
> And then they wanted to tell me I was bad as well.
> And then wanted to deny and deny and tell me I wasn't productive.
> What do you mean I haven't been productive?
> And they would just say it and that was it.

Public service motivation and thwarted potential have a symbiotic relationship. When you are engaged in work that sparks your potential then enthusiasm and good work follows.

Unlike the experience of Rose and her perception of working in the public service.

> They don't like people with any intelligence or initiative because if you have that you can see how totally the system is being misused. It doesn't do what it says it's going to do. Most people work very well with the assumption that most people are unintelligent, misinformed and have no aspirations.
>
> So if you are intelligent and informed and know the system back to front and you know the *OH and S Act* and the *Disability Act* and the *Intellectually Impaired Persons Act* and all the Quality frameworks that they say that they run by, when you know all that and you can throw that back in their face it scares them.

Also there is an issue with a public service culture that discounts workers' endeavours. There is nothing that thwarts potential more than engaging in work that does not matter.

Tom discusses this practice.

> You find you try to do your job properly and well, you are constantly being questioned as why you are doing things. And then you produce evidence proving that's how you do the job and you're told it doesn't really matter.

If your work does not really matter then there is little point in putting in your best effort or any effort at all. If work does not really matter then maintaining enthusiasm or even turning up is an effort. Society wants the public service to engage in work that matters. To discover that this is not the case diminishes the already poor reputation of the public service.

Thwarted potential does not discriminate by age or pay grade. Not all my participants were baby boomers who had failed to reach the top of the public service hierarchy. Janelle was a young woman who suffered and was frustrated at her thwarted potential.

> I'm still a clerk 1/2.
>
> *I know some clerk 1/2s that have been at that grade for 30 years.*
>
> I know people like that too.
>
> *You don't want to be like that?*

> Yes exactly. That's why I want to get out. Somewhere where I've got a chance to, you know, prosper.
>
> *Yes of course. Is there a chance for transfer?*
>
> There is but it's just doing the same job again at another office. Or just doing some boring c..p like finance or purchasing for head office.
>
> *Like there are positions in purchasing.*
>
> Oh God yes. But such boring stuff. And that's why there is nowhere else for me to go but out.
>
> *So how long have you been the public service?*
>
> I've been in the public service for 7 years. And I'm 28.
>
> *Are you the only one in your family with a public service job?*
>
> No. My dad, my mum and my brother.
>
> *Are they happy in their work?*
>
> Of course not.

And then there are people who have given up, who are doing their time, waiting for their superannuation. Living a half life, wishing their time away.

Tom describes his colleagues.

> There are many people in my workplace who honestly just don't care. That's their way of coping with it because they don't want to put up with it anymore. They just want to be out of there. So virtually they'll just come in and do their few hours and then they say I'm leaving.

The superannuation trap was a dilemma for many of my participants. In the public service these people were known as the 'superannuation glitterati'. But as Tom states it is not about the money, but about living with good mental health and a reason for getting up.

> I can see an end point.
>
> *But without an end point?*
>
> I'd go mad. People have said to me; look how long you've worked here for. 25 years. What about your superannuation? And I say; it's not good enough, even though it's a very good scheme. It's not good enough to make me want to stay.
>
> No I can't envision that, I can't imagine being here for the next 15 years.

Many of my participants went to jobs they hated and when I asked them why they didn't leave they said their superannuation was keeping them there. It begs the question of whether the superannuation payout is worth the suffering?

As Tom philosophises about leaving his secure, generous superannuation package, public service job.

> There is nothing worse in life than regret.
> I'm close to the tipping point. It's now or never.

You cannot expect to be at the top of your game if your potential has been thwarted over a long period of time. Thwarted potential not only affects you at the time but in your future working experience where you bear the scars and the residue for past injustices. The road to recovery is often slow and long. And sometimes the ambition to reach your potential is an aspiration gone forever. A fatality of public service employment.

## Chapter Nine - More than just bad behaviour

(Seriously unacceptable behaviour in the public service)

In this chapter I will tackle 'more than just bad behaviour'. Not the behaviours already discussed in the chapter *Personality of Tyranny*. But rather the fellatio, the breast touching, the chair sniffing and the extraordinary behaviours, that happen in the public service where it appears to be acceptable to treat people in demeaning and hostile ways because of their gender or character despite policies, legislation, Emotional Intelligence workshops or the advent of the 21st century.

There will be a discussion of the incidence of corruption in the public service. Where it is more than just a few bad apples, but rather a pervasive and widespread culture of non-compliance with legal obligations and a less-than-enthusiastic supervisory system that permits corrupt activities to continue over many years undetected and unchecked (Independent Commission Against Corruption, 2007).

Also I will examine the hostile working environment where taxpayers' dollars prop up a system that damages many. It was often challenging to hear the stories of extreme bad behaviour in the public service. Before I undertook this study I was not aware of the severity of such situations. By discussing the extremely unacceptable behaviours that are still occurring in the public service then there may be some hope in eradicating these behaviours, so that the public service becomes a safe and healthy working environment.

## Corruption

> Corruption in RailCorp[10] is endemic and enduring.
>
> This investigation has exposed an extraordinary extent of public service corruption. Corrupt employees appeared to be confident that they would not be caught or if they were that not much would happen to them.
>
> (ICAC Investigation into Corruption at RailCorp, December 2008)

Before this study I would not have thought that the public service was corrupt. This is not a third world country where you can bribe public servants for action or inaction. The impetus for this section came about when I heard a participant say 'You just pay the people off and then you will get the contract'.

It is a matter of public record that there are parts of the public service that are corrupt.

The NSW Independent Commission against Corruption (ICAC) was established in 1989 in response to growing community concern about the integrity of public administration. ICAC are so swamped with complaints, that their ability to investigate is severely hampered by the lack of resources and the level of complaints. In fact in their 8th report about RailCorp, ICAC reports that:

> Given the Commission's finite resources, it is untenable that the Commission continues to devote such time and effort to investigating and preventing corruption in just one of NSW's many public agencies.

At RailCorp it would appear that corrupt behaviour is rife and out of control. ICAC's investigation into Rail is highly critical. It revealed that corruption at Rail was widespread, that is was endemic and that the culture encouraged corruption.

> The very structure of the organisation and the way it operates allows and encourages corruption; the form of contracting, process design, reporting arrangements, management competence, culture and oversight arrangements all contribute to endemic corruption.

[10] RailCorp is the State-owned corporation offering passenger rail services within New South Wales (www.railcorp.info)

> The Commission investigated allegations of fraud, bribery, improper allocation of contracts, unauthorised secondary employment, failure to declare conflicts of interest, falsification of time sheets, and a cover-up of a safety breach.

ICAC continued and lengthy investigations into RailCorp uncovered public servants who were too cocky, or too stupid, or too smart to believe that their corrupt behaviour would have any repercussions.

> Lawfully intercepted telephone conversations revealed RailCorp personnel were engaging in corrupt conduct at a time when that same type of corrupt conduct by others was being publicly exposed and extensively reported in the media. The investigation and findings entitle the Commission to infer that the type of corruption exposed extends beyond those individuals identified in this investigation. Therefore the conclusions have applications throughout RailCorp and for other agencies.
>
> The persons who were subject to corrupt conduct appeared to grasp every opportunity available to them to exploit their employment within RailCorp to corruptly maximise the financial benefits they could derive from their work. Some employees brazenly engaged in corrupt conduct up to and even during the public inquiries for this investigation, suggesting detection mechanisms and consequences for corruption in RailCorp were weak or non-existent. Such a pattern of corruption cannot be attributed solely to a few problem people, but must be viewed as systemic. That the corruption continued to occur so widely after repeated findings by past investigations into RailCorp and its predecessors raises questions about the determination and ability of the organisation, as managed and structured at the time of the investigation, to deal with corruption.

ICAC Report
*Investigation into bribery and fraud at RailCorp.*
December 2008 – 8th Report, page 5.

This demonstrates to me a shambolic organisation that either could not cope or could not care. ICAC continues to discuss the long history of corruption at RailCorp.

> Allegations and investigations of corruption are not new to RailCorp. Since 1992 the Commission has conducted six major investigations into RailCorp, in both its present and previous forms, all of which found corruption.

> Much of the corruption found previously was similar in nature to that exposed in this investigation. In the light of this history, the knowledge of the specific risks of corruption faced by RailCorp should have meant that these risks were managed as a matter of priority. This was not the case.

This shows that regardless of the reports from ICAC, a large public service organisation will lumber along with little care and little responsibility. To think that the ICAC investigations have been undertaken since 1992 and there is still no attention to corruption management makes you doubt the will of the public service to tackle these issues.

When a RailCorp management representative gave evidence at one of the many hearings, he told the bench that corruption prevention was not one of his main priorities. His priority was trains running on time and the safety of the travelling public. In light of the many serious inabilities for public transport agencies to guarantee either of these two things, it would appear that even these priorities were not being met.

In this particular investigation ICAC states that:

> Managers failed to properly monitor the activities of their staff, failed to take effective action to manage known corruption risks and improper conduct, and failed to ensure proper record keeping or to conduct proper checks. As a result, there was no credible threat of detection to act as a deterrent to corrupt conduct (page 30).

As you can see RailCorp management failed and failed and failed again. It is a wonder any train leaves the station.

When you read the litany of corruption that ICAC has uncovered, from building dog kennel complexes for private purposes with TAFE funds, trading sexual favours for development permits and individuals moving up the public housing list by bribery, it would appear that the Australian public service is a place where not only does corruption happen but flourishes. This is not the public service that most Australians

would expect. Corrupt behaviour by public servants pollutes the very society it is charged with serving. It makes you ashamed to be a public servant.

## Sexual harassment

> Organisation narratives are inscriptions of past performances and scripts and staging instructions for future performances (Czarniawska, 1998).

A rock spider in jail is afforded more protection than a woman in the public service who has been sexual harassed (Sharon, 2010).

The *Australian Human Rights Commission* in their 2008 Sexual Harassment National Telephone Survey found that sexual harassment continues to be a problem in Australian workplaces. The 2008 survey found that 22% of women and 5% of men aged 18-64 have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace in their lifetime. Around one in three women in Australia aged 18-64 have experienced sexual harassment in their lifetime. The majority of sexual harassment continues to be experienced in the workplace (65%).

- Nearly half of those who have been sexually harassed in the last five years report that it has also happened to someone else in the same workplace.
- Over one in ten Australians has witnessed sexual harassment in the workplace in the last five years.

The survey found that there is a lack of understanding about what sexual harassment is.

- Around one in five(22%) respondents who said they **had not** experienced 'sexual harassment' then went on to report having experienced behaviours that may in fact amount to sexual harassment under the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth). For example:

- 5% reported behaviour(s) that included physical harassment such as unwelcome touching, hugging, cornering or kissing, inappropriate physical contact, or actual or attempted rape or assault.
- 10% reported being subject to unwelcome sexually suggestive comments or jokes that made them feel offended.
- 9% reported being subject to unwelcome intrusive questions about their private life or physical appearance that made them feel offended.

Sexual harassment: Serious business
Australian Human Rights Commission
October 2008

What follows is an article that exposes an Australian politician sniffing the chair of a female colleague. The defence by his colleagues was 'he is a rough diamond'. I use this 'defence' throughout the chapter to highlight the dysfunctional culture that still surrounds sexual and gender harassment in public life.

## *Did sniff colleague's chair, admits politician*

***One of Australia's most senior conservative politicians broke down as he tearfully admitted sniffing the chair of a female colleague shortly after she vacated it.***

Telegraph

Nick Squires
29 April 2008

Troy Buswell, the leader of the opposition Liberal Party in Western Australia, was under intense pressure to resign over the incident, which happened in 2005.

He dismissed allegations on 13 different occasions that he had sniffed the seat, before finally admitting yesterday that it had in fact taken place.

"All I can confirm is that the events described in the paper [The West Australian] by the former female staffer are accurate," he said.

Holding back tears at a news conference, Mr Buswell admitted that his behaviour before becoming party leader three months ago had sometimes been highly offensive.

He has previously admitted to snapping a woman's bra as a drunken party trick and has been accused by a retiring Liberal MP of making sexist remarks to her.

The emergence of the chair-sniffing incident had placed a strain on his marriage, he conceded.

"These are difficult issues for me to deal with and they are very difficult issues for my family to deal with," he said.

"It's hard dealing with these matters and having to face up to your responsibilities behaviourally, publicly, and it's harder to do it privately."

Mr Buswell's deputy, Kim Hames, stood by him, describing him as a rough diamond with a robust sense of humour.

"To me, Troy's a rough diamond and you don't fix a rough diamond by smashing it to pieces," said Dr Hames.

"You take those rough edges off and you've got something that is of quality, and I think Troy is a quality person, and when you get to know him and know what he's like, these incidents aren't what he's like."

> Other members of the Liberal party said privately they were disgusted by the whole episode, but would not challenge Mr Buswell as leader of the Liberals because there was no better candidate.
>
> The woman at the centre of the row, who wants to remain anonymous, said the seat-sniffing saga happened at Mr Buswell's office in the Western Australian state parliament.
>
> The MP had done it to get a laugh from colleagues, she claimed. "I was shocked and outraged and I told him," she said.

It is not surprising if politicians can sniff seats of women colleagues, snap their bras and tell sexist jokes that some public servants think it is acceptable to engage in such behaviour. Maybe they are all 'diamonds in the rough (Hames[11], 2008)'.

Sharon experienced sexual harassment.

> At one stage they were trying to claim that I had a love interest in J. I was a spurned lover and that's why I had gone on this campaign because I wanted revenge because he wouldn't date me.
>
> The guy in HR, by this stage HR had got involved, he was managing the J thing that resulted in him getting the sack, and he was great. The guy that was interviewing me about the sexual harassment from J said 'You are such a credible witness because you can provide some much detail and precise times. No one can make that up. And when I ask you another way you always give the same the response. You never waiver in what you are saying'. And in his experience: he said 'Woman don't often make these things up. Because there is always some truth to it. Basically he said J struck him as an absolute liar and manipulator'. And I felt really good about that because I felt finally I had been validated. Because for so long I had been made out as a trouble maker and liar. And finally someone saw J for what he was. And you know, justice prevailed, he got the sack.

Maybe J is a 'diamond in the rough' (Hames, 2008). And more examples of 'diamonds in the rough (Hames, 2008)' at Jane's workplace.

[11] Dr Kim Hames (2008) – Opposition Deputy Leader of the Western Australian Liberal Party

So they would tell these disgusting jokes And she asked this man not to do that. He went and he said she shouldn't work there.

Because she couldn't take it. She was too sensitive.

So it was a pretty bad joke. It was a rape type joke. A rape joke, like you know.

I think the guys in there think it's so much funnier if they say it in front of the females who work there. In front of the female staff who work there, who would find it offensive. They would find it amusing.

*You're not allowed.*

I know they're not allowed but everyone from senior management down, everyone does it.

And then they all decided she was a d..e.

*So is that the worst thing you can be? A d..e?*

Well it wasn't nice for her.

Another 'diamond in the rough (Hames, 2008)?'

Management was told, HR was told, the union told, the 'rough diamond (Hames, 2008)' identified. She had to tell the story over and over again. Like Jane. Like Sharon. And like Robyn she has left and the 'rough diamond (Hames, 2008)' has stayed, HR has stayed and management has stayed.

The retelling and retelling of the harassment by the victim adds to the trauma, as the following very disturbing account by Jane demonstrates.

Well the first lot was with this guy bringing up the child abuse that my father did. He was my father's friend. And he was bringing it up in the middle of the yard, the work out yard of the prisoners. 'I hope he never got into you girls because he would split you in half'. In the middle of the yard, full of prisoners. Saying it was bad enough but saying it there.

It was a serious matter. It was serious because at first he asked me did he ever, because he knew him.

The discussion started when I was in the office and he said, because he knew my dad and something came up about my dad. I said 'I really didn't like my dad and I don't really need to talk about it'.

And he said something about him being quite a drinker and I said 'Yeah he was'.

And then he said 'Did he, ever interfere with you girls when you were younger.- And I said to him very politely, 'Yes I was abused when I was younger but I don't want to talk about that'.

And that was the third time I said it. And he wouldn't take no for an answer.

And he started going on there was something strange, so I thought I need to get out, to get to the yard. So he chased me, followed me out and then he made the comment; I hope he never got into you because he would have split you girls in half.

And I was like 'I don't want to talk about it'. And you know, and you know and I think I was in a bit of shock or something.

I just sort of did a quick lap of the yard and went into the toilet because he couldn't follow me there. I went into the case study room and just sat there and opened one of my case load files and I just sort of stared at the files because I was due to go home in about 20 minutes. I just stared at the file for 20 minutes. Never did anything on it. And then I just went home. And I think I was really in shock. I didn't say anything to anybody on my way out. I just walked out.

*Now everyone knows.*

I had to repeat it over and over again. Everything 20,000 times. So they basically made it so he and I never linked up in shifts.

He wrote me this letter

Very badly spelt. He wrote me this letter and it said, very basically that if he said anything to offend you I didn't mean it. I don't know what I've said that could have offended you. And if I said anything that offended you I didn't mean it.

I ripped it up or chucked it out or something.

*Do you think it was heartfelt?*

I don't know if it was or not. I don't know. How could someone be so stupid? Say something like that without thinking that this is going to upset someone and it's not the appropriate place for me to be talking about it.

To think Jane had to tell her story over and over again makes me weep. And again HR stayed, management stayed and the 'rough diamond (Hames, 2008)' stayed. It would appear that a badly spelt apology is enough to explain away 'more than just bad behaviour'.

The betrayal of sexually harassed women continues when the salt is rubbed into the wound by inadequate or inappropriate responses from public service managers and others who are entrusted with the responsibility to intervene (Morgan, 2002). There appears to be an inadequate response to repeated acts of 'more than just bad behaviour'.

It is well established that sexual harassment targets suffer a variety of negative consequences (Paetzold, 2004). Formal reporting did not improve and sometimes worsened the physical and psychological health of the sexual harassed. This is certainly the experience of many of my participants. As you read their stories the regime of disbelief of complaints that is pervasive in the public service wins over and over again, even in the face of the most compelling evidence.

Not only does sexual harassment affect the victim but those who witness it. The ripple of sexual harassment is strong in a public service organisation. The ripple also affects third party non-witnessing staff, like HR managers and senior staff who are supposed to deal with these issues. These people often set the tone of an organisation especially when there is an attitude of blaming the victim, or a 'rough diamond' mentality. HR Managers and others who are asked to intervene usually only have second-hand information about the situation (Salin, 2009). Organisational tolerance of sexual harassment is related to incidence of harassment. Women who work in a mostly male environment, with male supervisors or perform stereotypically male tasks are most likely to encounter sexually harassing situations (Lee, Heilmann and Near, 2004). Organisational climate affected key factors such as the frequency of sexual harassment, whether organisations had a dismissive attitude toward reporting and the likelihood of retaliation against the reporting target, thereby influencing organisational responses (Paetzold, 2004). Many parts of the public service have a climate that facilitates sexual harassment.

People become disillusioned through the mistreatment of co-workers. It might be them next. There are negative contagious effects on other employees when inappropriate, offensive or harassing behaviour is perpetuated.

What follows are the very sage comments from a woman, like so many others who left her job because of the 'diamonds in the rough' at her workplace. Diamonds in the rough, who sexual harass and embarrass women yet still work in the public service untouched.

*So why did you leave in the end?*

Because my boyfriend slept with the secretary.

And I had to see it every day at work.

Which is probably irrelevant for this interview. But that was another example. He use to prey on woman at work. There was me, the secretary.

He always slept with women from work.

It wasn't so much for me because I was on a similar par but when he went to another centre he used to sleep with lots of woman.

One of his girlfriends had keys to the whole centre, and he was in a senior position and here was someone with keys to everything. His girlfriend would answer his work mobile and stuff like that.

There were definitely benefits for the woman to have him as a boyfriend.

I tried to talk to someone about a sexual harassment case. And got laughed at.

He's still with the secretary and C….t knows who else.

*Why was the sexual harassment claim laughed at?*

Because that's just B.

*That's why you left?*

Yes. And I never was going to go anywhere. It was just, nothing was done to him. He got away with doing a whole swag of things.

Stuff that was really inappropriate.

Nothing was done and I was just left feeling like an idiot.

So embarrassed. I felt like a fool and when I tried to do something about it I was just made to feel even stupider.

No. S..t no. S..t no. In fact, it's almost; I've seen it here too. It's applauded. Good on you, mate. It happens at conferences, a lot. I've had really

inappropriate comments made to me and about me. I don't think the person knew I was actually in hearing.

*What, he said sexual things about you?*

Yeah, yeah the CEO. The senior operations manager said: I see you making moves on Carol there. You know you've got to keep these women under control.

Oh yes. Very paternalistic. I don't think they meant anything nasty by it. But it's the whole underlying. That's our girl. Sort of patronising behaviour.

I think it's such a male construct. You know there is nothing in the workplace to dissuade you from acting inappropriately. Let's put it that way. And women are more subjected to that then men. Because woman get a bad name and blokes are heroes.

Yep and it's sad. And you see the woman in high places and they are only ever spoken about in terms of who did they sleep with, how did they get there. Or if it's not in that respect, they're ball breakers. And the sad thing is some of them do have very masculine traits. So you can see, even if it's inappropriate, how they got that sort of label. But I think they have to be like that to get there. It's sort of masculating.

Well if you emasculate someone, you can surely masculate someone.

But the ones that don't. That try to hold on to the concept of femininity are asked who they slept with. And the sad thing is, that in some cases it's actually true. They got further because they did give out. It's very hard to get anywhere if you're just a chick playing it straight.

It is hard to imagine that a publicly funded workplace in the 21st century stills views women's' promotions on who they slept with or whose balls they have broken. Carol's experiences are the not the delusional hype of the public service spouted through mission statements, strategic plans and total quality management. Carol's workplace appears to come out of the 1950s where men sleep with co-workers and are heroes and women are too emotional to make decisions. The public service is not a place we would want our daughters to work in. A sad indictment of the organisation that is supposed to adhere to Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), valuing diversity and a commitment to social justice.

There is a sense of déjà vu in reading the stories of harassed women in the public service.

Women who complain are moved. There is no grey area here. It is against public service policy and legislation. Yet it happens. Maybe the cases are so isolated that no one has joined the dots. I find it hard to believe that this is true. I fear there is no political will to make endemic changes to make women feel included, valued and safe.

Sexual harassment is not just the insensitive or nefarious pursuit of sexual expression and gratification. However in the public service this sort of mentality has led to policies that focus on policing sexual behaviour at work rather than on acts that perpetuate gender inequalities. If sexual harassment is seen as a pervasive mechanism for punishing and a way to enforce different standards of behaviour in women and men, then it serves as a basic means for creating different terms and conditions of employment on the basis of gender (Berdahl, 2007b).

## Gender harassment

> All the important decisions are made in the men's toilets (Wendy, 2010).

A definition of gender based harassment is;

> Behaviour that derogates, demeans, or humiliates an individual based on that individual's sex including seemingly sex-neutral acts such as repeated provocation, silencing, exclusion or sabotage that are experienced by an individual because of sex (Berdahl, 2007).

Gender still seems to play a role in the careers and experiences of public servants. In many of my participants' stories gender was still an issue.

Despite the rhetoric, there are still inequalities in the workplace around gender especially in the male strongholds of the public service. What appears to be an open door to occupations

dominated by men is actually a revolving door: More women enter than in the past, but many of them quickly exit .Those that remain encounter obstacles that limit their advancement opportunities and confine them to gender stereotyped tasks. Despite progress, women have not been completely integrated into the station house, court- room, or prison (Martin and Jurik, 1996). Women continue to be underrepresented in these occupations largely as a result of such barriers as bias, stereotyping and tokenism (Grube-Farrel, 2002).

You would think that there would have been far more successful integration into the 'uniformed public service'. The experiences of my participants would suggest not. There is the continued existence of hostile working environments and the lack of appropriate and adequate workplace supervision.

In many traditional male-orientated public service agencies the presence of women is met with both cover and overt hostility. The fact that a woman can do the same job is a slap in the face for some men as seen in the stories of Sharon, Abby, Carol and Jane. Misogyny is alive and well in their workplaces.

According to the Miller, Forest and Jurik 2003 study, their participants said that the male world was the greatest barrier for advancement if you were a woman, or gay, or anything other than a white straight male. Many of my participants had experienced these types of barriers.

An example of this type of 'more than just bad behaviour' follows.

> Well I had to deal with the Operations Managers' group. And they were a bunch of bullies.
>
> *So were you in charge of Training.*
>
> That's the only place where a woman can be.

> In all the time I was there, there was only one other woman, other than myself, who was in a managerial type position.
>
> They refused to transfer her. She didn't get the same benefits. She never got flown across for meetings. She finally got the s..ts and told them to stick it.
>
> *So you were the top woman?*
>
> I probably held the top female position. I was originally invited to all their operations meetings, until I started to disagree with them about stuff.
>
> I didn't agree with a lot of the stuff and it didn't go down well.
>
> *So in 2009 there will be no woman in management positions.*
>
> It's always been like that. It's really tragic. It's not because there is a shortage of woman in the service. It's quite good. It's like 50/50. I mean in terms of skills there are plenty of women.
>
> *Are there any old women or only old men?*
>
> Oh no. There are a couple of older women, who actually did try their hand in management and only lasted a couple of months. And said: you know what. I can't deal with this.
>
> *Because it's a fight every day?*
>
> That's the way it works and it's always been that way.

Gender, sexual orientation and other dimensions of social difference sometimes serve as organising features of work organisations. Socially deviant workers are more visible than those of the dominant social type. Their performance is subject to intense scrutiny and they must excel to be deemed competent (Miller et al, 2003).

According to Berdahl (2007b) women in male dominated areas who are assertive and independent are harassed the most. She states that the most common form of sexual harassment is gender harassment. A form of hostile environment harassment, that appears to be motivated by hostility toward the individual who violates gender ideals.

Hostile environment harassment does not involve trying to establish sexual or romantic relations with the target, but rather makes a target feel unwelcome in the workplace on the basis of gender (Berdahl, 2007b).

Gender harassment undermines, humiliates or rejects on the basis of sex with sexual and sexist remarks, jokes, materials or pranks (Berdahl, 2007b). Gender harassment appears to be motivated by sexist hostility not sexual desire.

It has been argued that gender is irrelevant in a rational-technical-legal bureaucracy. However Yancey Martin (2003) sees gender as a pervasive practice in bureaucratic workplaces. Sex segregation in many forms has spanned multiple decades and different organisations.

What the public service understands as gender neutral is the life of a white man. The so called empty position for which organisations recruit assumes the body and life of a man, not a gender-free person (Berdahl, 2007b).

Men need not invent schemes for excluding women from daily work processes in order for women to experience exclusion. In simply going along with institutionalised features of the gender order, men perpetuate masculinism, a bias in favour of men, and a masculinist or masculine/man-centred workplace (Yancey Martin, 2003).

Bureaucratic organisations are fundamentally constructed by gender. This condition, which is unhealthy for many men and most women can and does cause pain, thwart potential and prompt disastrous and incompetent results (Yancey-Martin, 2003).

Theories and research that ignore gendering practices mischaracterise workplaces and workers' experiences, leaving their presence and effect unchallenged. In the work setting where people pay careful attention to the actions of others and are particularly sensitive to disparate treatment, opportunities for perceptions of injustice are rampant. With this

comes employee dissatisfaction, job-withdrawal behaviours including absenteeism, lateness, time-theft and turnover (Neuman, 2004).

Some participants of this study came from organisations based on military organisational structures. With strict hierarchy and an emphasis on chain of command rather than democratic decision making and collaborative work environments.

The following is a story of gender harassment. It boiled down to a 'skinny chick', who was too keen, doing a job that men has done for years.

> No it was all behind me. They're all gutless. So they would write things on the board. They would write jokes. I'd walk into a room and they would all stop talking till I would leave the room.
>
> My lunch would get stolen. Someone would eat it. My computer files on the computer system. I had my own folder and that is where I had saved all my university stuff there. And someone deleted it.
>
> *Incompetent or malicious?*
>
> Oh no malicious. Because it was deleted out of the deleted section. It was gone. I sent up a newsletter. It was for stupid stuff like recipes and bios. And I put them in everyone's pigeon hole and then someone ripped them up and put them in my pigeon hole.
>
> *Was it because you were too keen?*
>
> Too keen, yes. And I think what it was. That they have these skinny little chicks come in and do the job they've been doing for a million years. They get threatened. There's a chick doing it.
>
> *Didn't you complain to the boss?*
>
> I complained to the boss at the time and he responded; the culture here will have to change. And he didn't do anything. The culture will have to change.
>
> Yeah, right.

## Hostile Working Environment

*There is a lot of suffering in the workplace and it shows little sign of letting up* (Frost, 2003).

A hostile working environment is defined as a workplace where workers experience fear, suffering and mistreatment. A hostile environment can be the result of an individual, management, supervisors or the system itself.

In hostile working environments, in restructured organisations or when the emotional cards are dealt too quickly, widely, or often, people suffer. Situations like nonstop change, massive turnover, reorganisation, budget crunches, downsizing, rigid and unfair policies or abusive bosses, can raise the emotional ante beyond the ability of individuals to self-manage and absorb. Emotions accumulate and the ability to manage pain and disappointment is impaired. The result is disrupted productivity, emotional overload and a toxic work environment (Gallos, 2008).

The public service as a hostile working environment is a constant theme in my participants' stories. When so many Australians working in the public service, paying attention to the proliferation of toxic, unjust and hostile working environments, is an endeavour that may assist in improving the health of the society in which we all live.

## Violence in the workplace

Injustice and stress are among the most common causes of workplace aggression. This combination of these behaviours causes enormous impacts on the health and well-being of individuals (Neuman, 2004).

My participants talked about colleagues who they thought could blow up their workplace or 'go postal'.[12]

> When he started to yell and threaten he should have been immediately put on disciplinary review. That's what should have happened. You refuse a direction and then you go disciplinary review. But that didn't happen because the person who was managing was a fat incompetent c..k. But when he turned around and actually threatened I wouldn't have gone through the department, I would have gone directly to the police station and had him charged. It was such a joke. I would have had him charged rather that leaving it up to the incompetency of my workplace.
>
> *I don't think you can work in the department with an AVO against you.*
>
> No you can't take up the appointment.
>
> He does have a license for a firearm and if you have an AVO against you the license for the firearm is revoked.
>
> You know I'm sometimes scared for myself even now.
>
> Because he's back at work now.
>
> J got the sack and he and S had a very close relationship. And he is this violent pathetic man who has nothing in his life except hatred and revenge.
>
> And he hates everyone at W and seriously he has some major psychological problems. But I'm high up on the hate list because I got his mate the sack.
>
> You know I'm always waiting for J or S to do something to me. You know every time I go out I check my car in the car park. I don't trust him.
>
> You know I'm working with C. She's quite nice. And she says: She's just waiting for J to go postal. And we just have a laugh. I mean you have to laugh about it.
>
> But he will come in one day and he will go postal. You know how they reckon postal workers just blow it and come in and kill their co-workers. Well I can see J doing that: he is unstable.
>
> And then there is S. Could you imagine being his wife? S has nothing nice to say about anything or anyone. One of the young guys we've got working for

---

[12] Going postal, is slang, meaning becoming extremely and uncontrollably angry, often to the point of violence, and usually in a workplace environment.

The expression derives from a series of incidents from 1983 onward in which United States Postal Service workers shot and killed managers, fellow workers, and members of the police and general public.

> us, he would be 21. He came back from working with S and he said: I don't know how to deal with this guy. He's so angry and bitter and twisted. I always saying; I'm not going to do this s..t or put up with this s..t. He is so arrogant. You really have to see his facial expressions and body language to appreciate how deranged he is. He feels so right in his own mind that he thinks he is going to triumph over all of us.

I wonder if S and J are just 'diamonds in the rough (Hames, 2008)'.

The following excerpts from my participants' stories demonstrate the violence that is sometimes perpetrated by the public who have reached their own limits.

> So they decided to remove the screens. You know the security screens they have in banks. So they decided to remove all the screens to improve communications. That was their justification. So really anyone can walk anywhere. And staff don't wear their badges, because they get spit on, when they walk in the street, so they don't wear their badges. So you don't know who works there. So really, you don't take any notice. This guy walked into the office and poured petrol onto everyone and lit it.
>
> And that's what happened in that office and it wasn't reported at all.

And more violence.

> And I know an incident where a client asked for a lend of a pen and she said sure, and the guy stabbed it into her cheekbone.

And more violence.

> I had a friend in H that got stabbed. They were watching him and they knew he went to the pub at lunch time and they stabbed him.

You would not expect that the public service would be such a physically dangerous place. It demonstrates that violence in the workplace is a clear and present danger for some public servants.

Some of my participants talked about their own sense of frustration at the injustices they endured. Many felt pushed to the edge, past their limits. When public service organisations cannot intervene or manage people who are at their limit then the workplace becomes dysfunctional. Effective and efficient for no one. Not the employees, the public or the organisation itself.

What follows is an example of someone pushed to their edge and not afraid to show it.

> *So you said you've got the evidence so sack me. And they said no.*
>
> Well I had one of the women from HR tell me one day that I had been identified as a disgruntled employee.
>
> *what does that mean?*
>
> I said 'well, one day you might have some explaining to do if I get pushed over the edge. One day when I've killed everyone you have recorded me as disgruntled and have done nothing. You'll be liable'.
>
> She just shrugged her shoulders and walked off and that was the end of it.
>
> How dumb are these people?
>
> I've said to them. I've written a lot of things over the years. Surely they can see this person is not happy at the workplace.
>
> You know we've got a potential problem. Let's get rid of this person. There is not a court in the land that wouldn't support that.

Violence ripples under the surface of many of my participants' stories and is apparent in much of their language. Violence done to them by colleagues or the public or violence perpetuated by them. This is not the public service Australians expect or deserve.

## Old Boys/New boys network

> When women co-workers socialise, they waste time: when men co-workers socialise, they advance their careers (Lipman-Blumen, 1976).

Although this was stated 40 years ago it would appear from the experiences of my participants that these sentiments have not changed within the public service.

According to Baumgartner and Schneider (2010) the issues for women includes overcoming stereotypes and contending with the 'old boys/new boys' network.

Although some organisations have recognised women are valuable additions to their workforce and have instituted changes to retain them, many men have done their best to prevent them from succeeding (Baumgartner and Schneider, 2010).

The 'old boys/new boys 'network can be understood by examining men's historical attitudes to women. Dubno, in his 1985 study, found that males maintained a negative attitude toward women managers over an eight year period despite numerous examples of societal advancement concerning women's rights. It would appear that this has not changed in the last twenty years.

The 'new boys' network was coined about men of the 1990s who had women classmates and co-workers so that theoretically these men would not see anything unusual in having women managers. However in a 1996 study by Everett, Thorne and Danehower replicated Dubno's study found that the 'new boys' negative attitudes toward women mangers has persisted. Conrad and Poole's 2005 study's saw women given token positions where there was no power of influence. In would appear that in 2011 'old boys/new boys' network still exist.

Old Boys seem to be alive and well in the public service. Many of the case study participants were plagued by managers that were part of the 'old boy' networks. It appears that the 'old boys' are being replaced by 'new old boys' despite the decades of EEO policy and practice.

Many of my participants felt they battled the 'old boys'' network every day. The following participant's story occurred in a Public service unit that had been managed by an individual that was perceived as fair and helpful. The individual gave positive reinforcement when deserved and managed his team robustly and with compassion. When he retired he was replaced by an individual who caused havoc in many people's lives. Jessie described him as one of the 'old boys' and an organisational psychopath. The appointment of this individual was largely seen as undeserved. It was felt that Ken was promoted beyond his capabilities and experience. Although there are stringent rules on public service recruitment, K did not go through the interview process but was rather tapped on the shoulder as a reward for his many years in the job.

Jessie is a capable, hard working professional who has suffered disenfranchisement through a management process of micromanagement.

> When K was promoted there was an outcry about how he could have got the position without interview.
>
> I corrected his spelling on a public document. I was crazy thinking he would be grateful that I saved him from public embarrassment.
>
> He went absolutely mental. Said I had no place in correcting his work.
>
> That I should show him respect. That I didn't understand the subtleties of his job. Please, he can't even spell subtleties.
>
> Said his work was none of my business and I should look in my own backyard with my alternative lifestyle. What does that mean? Alternative lifestyle? When I pressed him on this he waved me away.
>
> I still feel sick in the stomach when I think about that time. My lifestyle is not really alternative. I am a middle aged public servant who wears grey and beige suits.
>
> Can we stop a minute I want to swear?

And Sharon's disturbing tale of the sins that the 'old boys/ new boys' can perpetrate and be protected.

> But that's the world of s..t where J came into it. I said, well hang on there's this guy who was f..king women at work, in his uniform during work hours,

getting his d..k sucked, stealing from the department and that's ok but Sharon you can spell and you are going to be performance managed.

*And he didn't get sacked?*

It took a long time. I mean he did get charged by the police for breaking into that woman's house and stalking and stuff, when he was in uniform.

When he was working for the Department. How come that never made the media? How come that wasn't across Current Affairs?

Officer of the Department breaking and entering and stalking woman using his position to gain access. Why didn't it get in the paper?

*And he was protected?*

Oh yeah. It's such a boy's club.

I had hoped that most of the 'old boys' had retired or died. To find out there is a 'new boys' network is discouraging and distressing.

The examples of 'more than just bad behaviour' show that these networks still exist. When the Western Australian politician was outed for sniffing the seat of a female colleague, he was described as a 'diamond in the rough'. I think I would describe him as something entirely different.

## Chapter - Ten Pain and Toxicity in the public service workplace

Pain is a fact of organisational life. Managers can proceed, quite confidently with the assumption, that "there is always grief somewhere in the workroom (Frost, 2003)!"

The public service will restructure, people will become displaced, and supervisors will be incompetent, hostile, abusive or moody. Everyday decisions, policies, mistakes and pressures inevitably trigger some employee pain. Ignoring the pain does not eliminate it. Anguish just goes underground and can erupt at unexpected times and in unanticipated places (Gallos, 2008). It is not this pain that causes toxicity in the workplace. It is the handling of this pain that determines whether the long-term effects turn the organisation into a toxic workplace. It is whether this pain is responded to in a harmful or healing way. The behaviours and attitudes of managers are often a main source of pain in organisations (Frost, 2003).

A toxic workplace is a work environment where people are not valued for their contributions to the organisation. Although the word toxic is strong and evocative the power of the toxicity of a workplace is in the power of the pervasiveness (Gallos, 2008). Symptoms of a toxic workplace include low morale, diminished performance, anger and frustration. A toxic workplace may manifest itself in a variety of ways and over an extended period of time. The toxicity seems to feed on itself and to grow if left unchecked, leaving employees feeling as if there is no relief from the constant attack. Many of us feel perfectly confident about our own worthiness. We are good at our jobs, have strong relationships with colleagues, friends and family. Yet we feel quite impotent when it comes to challenging toxic leaders or altering the dysfunctional systems they have put in place (Lipman-Blumen, 2005).

Toxic diffusion can be deliberate efforts by pained individuals to seek what they see as justifiable recourse or revenge, repeated public venting of strong emotions or stories about the circumstances that evoked them, false accusations, attacks on colleagues or processes or more insidious strategies like scapegoating, gossip, isolating targeted individuals or vandalism (Gallos, 2008). Negative emotion is contagious and there is a rapid rise of system affect from empathetic identification with peers who suffer.

It is certainly part of my participants' stories that their strong emotions have not been dealt with. The following excerpt from Sharon demonstrates the devastating effects of unmanaged strong emotions when it comes to injustice perpetrated by management

> You know when I see something unjust. When I see someone else being treated unjustly in the workplace I have to act. But I hate it. I really hate it.
>
> I hate management taking advantage of people because of their lack of knowledge.
>
> Really there are so many people in the office who have no idea about their employment conditions.
>
> And management prey on it. They just take advantage of them.
>
> I mean I just get livid about it. There are other things, like leave entitlements, and I hate it. Everyone is entitled to leave. And there is young Mike and I told him he was entitled to overtime and he was just flabbergasted. I showed him how to put in a claim.
>
> I f..king hate management for that. Management hates you if you know your entitlements.
>
> You know they think the department will love them if they save money. Look I can't stand when I see injustice.

If a manager is toxic and persists in this behaviour, there needs to be an examination of how he or she got there and what keeps this person in place. Often managers with strong technical skills and poor people skills get promoted regardless of this deficit. They make poor managers unless they are held accountable for their toxic behaviour and unless they are trained to prevent or deal with the toxins they produce (Frost, 2003).

This idea is clearly demonstrated by my participants' experiences with supervisors with strong technical skills and poor people management skills. As Wendy states;

> Another thing they do is put people in management with no management training.
>
> So you have people apply for positions who move from a technical competence into a management position.
>
> And they may be very good in the area of their technical expertise but have no skills, no training and walk into management.
>
> It's not their fault; it's a fault of the system.
>
> People are just moved up because of length of time served.
>
> And a lot of public servants go through that process. If you've been a public servant for 20 years, then you are a senior person and you deserve promotion. It's not about the inherent qualities of the job. Not want skills you have, the skills that match the job and if you haven't got them they don't give you training, they don't encourage you to get the training or try and foster good management practices.
>
> There is no management. It's management by default.

Frost (2003) makes the observation that the tone is set from the top. Toxic leaders are destructive individuals who abuse their power, role and followers for immoral or narcissistic purposes (Gallos, 2008).

Cathy's story demonstrates the havoc a toxic boss can create for staff at all levels of an organisation.

> In a one month period, we were all off for a week on stress leave. Not including her.
>
> There's another person who has been on Work Cover stress leave for more than 12 months. She believes short term stress leave is fine. And when all of us went on stress leave, from the GP at the organisation. And when I went to him, and I said, 'I'm at breaking point' and he asked, 'Where do you work?' and I told him, he said 'You're not the first one to come here'.

> That's a real issue that I have. The Managers know, HR knows, Staff Relations know, the Deputy CO now knows. Everyone in my unit knows. And everyone in the organisation knows.
>
> And nothing happens.
>
> And no one will talk to her directly because they're scared of the repercussions. They're all frightened of her because she will come back at you. She'll be after you. And she tells you she's going to do it.
>
> We have a senior staff member, who has written books, gets great, great money from companies that want to support her. She knows her stuff inside out.
>
> And she has been on stress leave for 3 months.
>
> She put in for promotion but the boss said;
>
> Don't bother applying, I've got someone else in mind.
>
> They were having a screaming match about it and then she emailed her and told her that she was taking responsibility of her program away from her and not to bother to apply for the promotion. So she put it in writing.
>
> She has no fear. Or no insight into what she does. But maybe she thinks she is a power to be reckoned with. And that she can do what she wants.

As Nicole's comments demonstrate working in a toxic environment can make you feel like a 'loser' without hope for the future.

> I sometimes think you have to go through this stuff as a learning process. But I think if you got supported and you didn't have to go through a period when you think you are a loser, and you are never going to get anywhere in life. You just lose your whole identity. It is devastating.

And like Nicole, Lily feels her whole essence is compromised when working for a toxic boss. Her perceptions of herself are damaged and toxicity ensues.

> I felt like s..t. I questioned everything I did. I couldn't make a decision. For God sakes I couldn't even decide what to wear to work. It was as if I was seeing me through that toxic b…h's eyes.

Toxicity occurs when an individual's attitude or organisational policies or both fail to take into account the emotional attachment people have to their contributions to work (Frost, 2003). This is true in some of my participants' stories. It was not that they cared too little but cared too much. But their experiences led to self-protection mechanisms of not caring so much. The only way to survive.

Sharon's comments are an example where pain was not managed and the end result was suffering and complete indifference and a disconnection from work.

> And when I spoke to the investigator I told her about the types of behaviours that were going on in the department. And I told her 'All I've done is the right thing. I've filled out my timesheet in line with the department's employee's guidelines. How can I be victimised and harassed for doing that?'
>
> But I was. And it was horrible. It was the worst experience of my f..king life. But you know what M told me: that I'll never give a s..t about anything again. Because it's just not worth it. And she's right.

Sharon continues to discuss how public service policies, can add to organisational toxicity.

> I'm an expert in grievance procedure. And do you know they sent me on a course called 'Conflict Resolution and Grievance Procedure'.
>
> And I said 'Do you want me to run it? Why do I need to do a grievance procedure course?'
>
> And do you know what they said to me? 'You didn't know how to behave to resolve this'.
>
> I said 'Excuse me, I did everything you're supposed to do according to the process'. You know I don't know how many times I tried to speak to S to resolve the 15 minutes on my time sheet. Here was an industrial agreement, a ratified agreement from Parliament. So don't say I didn't f..king do it. And that d..khead was adamant that he was right. And every time he would harass me about it, I would try to resolve it. Because in conflict resolution you are supposed to start with the person you have an issue with. And if you don't get any satisfaction there, then you go to the immediate supervisor.

> And I did everything I was f..king suppose to do. I did everything I could possibly do. They would always say I had the wrong end of the stick.

People who are unhappy at work may disconnect from work turning their attentions to their suffering rather than doing excellent work. This is the case for many of my participants. Lyn talks about the vicious circle that can happen when work is toxic.

> That was it. You were bad. You were deemed bad. So then they take steps to cutting you off to any decent work. Ostracising you. And it just goes from there. And you never get a rung up again. Every time you arrive at work late.
>
> And then there's a spiral.
>
> Because you think everyone hates you and you don't want to be there. So you take a long lunch. And then people say you had a long lunch.
>
> It's just awful, awful.

The suffering and the pain continues in Nicole's story. I include the silences to hopefully pass on her feelings of distress, hopelessness and betrayal.

> I used him as an excuse, anyway (quiet).
>
> I lost it after that. I just thought I can't go back to work.
>
> I absolutely hate it. I'm just so torn up, I'm just so.....
>
> I felt I was just trying to do the right thing.
>
> Like I felt I was trying to progress in my career and it was about time I did that.
>
> I was trying to look after my mates.
>
> But then I was in a position of shafting them and I had no support.
>
> So I was just really torn.
>
> I went for this job and I didn't cope at all.
>
> And I ended up basically losing the plot for 3 or 4 days. I was completely dysfunctional. I couldn't go out of the house. I had to get my friends to go and fill in this police report thing for me.
>
> I just, I ended up.
>
> What I should have done in retrospect is rang up my boss and said 'I'm going off sick and it's none of your business. But I rang him up and said (quiet) I'm not coping with this' and he shafted me.

*So you told someone the truth.*

He identified that I could never do the job ever again. And that I was completely incompetent and all that.

I had a fairly significant psychological event I think and I should have sensed, rather than trust people and tell them the truth

You shouldn't tell the truth.

The notion that the truth should never be revealed to a public service manager or public service organisation when you are suffering only compounds the suffering. Frost (2003) states that a lack of compassion or the inability or unwillingness to empathise with the plight of another and act accordingly greatly impairs work relationships. This lack of compassion and empathy is evident in Nicole's story above but it is also evident in many of my participants' stories.

Lily talks about the lack of empathy from her public service supervisor.

Looking back I think I had a breakdown. I wouldn't answer my phone just in case it was work. My new boss was a young guy. He rang and tried to have meetings with me but the thought of going to work would send me into a panic attack.

This guy had no empathy. No 'emotional intelligence'.

So the last conversation he rang me up and started yelling at me and telling me I would report to work tomorrow.

And I said 'I will kill myself'. This was not an idle threat. I was suicidal. Death for me was a better option than turning up to work on Monday morning.

And this is etched on my mind for ever. He said 'That's neither here nor there. You will turn up to work on Monday. '

What sort of management school did he go to do? What sort of human being would say that? When confronted with a suicidal staff member your response is 'That's neither here nor there'. What a p…k.

> I have a theory about that. Mr D..khead married his childhood sweetie, had two children, and went into the public service after school. His father also was in the public service. His range of experiences was so small, his life so ordered. Well good for him.
>
> Can a human being be so limited that you have no compassion for your fellow human being? And really how can someone with such limited human experience be in charge of people who are complicated and messy and have breakdowns and who can't cope?

Lily has valid questions. The inability of public service supervisors to act in compassionate and caring ways leads to an uncaring working environment where the human cost is too high. An unfeeling response undermines people's confidence, esteem, dignity and a sense of connectiveness to others. It removes the desire and the ability to do their job (Frost, 2003). Lily's supervisor was incapable or unwilling to give his staff member what Hallowell (1999) calls the 'human moment'. The human moment is when a colleague or manager gives a distressed colleague their physical presence as well as their emotional and intellectual attention. The absence of the ability to give people a human moment can result in despair and disenfranchisement. Good people leave. Those who remain are unhappy. If a few more human moments had occurred in my participants' stories, then the cost not only to the individual, but to the public service as a whole would have been greatly diminished and even mitigated.

When people are shocked and confused by what happens to the work, their confidence is shaken and they experience dismay, anger and indignation. Frost (2003) believes that people burdened with such feelings cannot easily attend to their day to day tasks and responsibilities. It is certainly the case in many of my participants' stories that attending to the day to day tasks of their public service jobs was nearly impossible due to their pain and the toxicity in the workplace. Even just being there was more than they could bear.

In Roger's story if the organisational pain had been handled in a timely and fair way the pain would not have been left to fester and turn into toxicity and taint his working life. So much

so that he recounts the story seven years after it happens. His pain of the past spills over into present.

Roger has applied for the Team Leader position three times. He had been acting in it for 18 months. He was reluctant to apply again due to his unsuccessful attempts in the past. The damage caused by these unsuccessful interviews was very real and close to the surface. With encouragement from his middle management, he applied for the position for a third time with disastrous and damaging results.

> No, no, no apply for it.
>
> And I said 'Why, it's the 3rd time .I've been doing it and I've been shafted every time before, why would I want to do it again now?'
>
> M said 'No just do it. You'll get it now for sure'.
>
> Internally there was myself and the other girl J, who applied for it. She didn't really want to apply for it. But some of her friends encouraged her to apply.
>
> Now when I came in the next morning after the interview J was also there. And I knew that she had applied for it. And she said 'How did you go?' And I said 'I was a bit nervous. You know my overheads were falling on the floor. But I got through it'. And I said 'How about you?' And she said 'I didn't do it. What do you mean?'
>
> I rang up and withdrew. And I said, Oh, Ok. Because I knew that she didn't understand any of that stuff. She got turned off by that because she knew that wasn't for her. So, you know if you ring up and say you are withdrawing, well you're out of the race. And I thought OK, that's fine.
>
> Now I was prepared if I didn't get the job and someone externally did, well they might have more experience than me. But in there, between the two of us, I'm the most experienced. And the other thing, why would you employ someone externally when I've been there for 10 or 12 years. Anyway, she said that she withdrew. And then she said 'What were the technical questions about?'And of course I told her.

Anyway later on that day, when L came in I saw her walk over to J and speaking to her. When we were having morning tea J came in and said L's making me do an interview. And I said' What do you mean she's making you do your interview. Like didn't you pull out?' And she said' You can do your interview on Wednesday. What, do you just want to stay in the same position for the rest of your life?' And I'm like 'I've just told you today everything that's in the interview. And now you're doing the interview'. And I didn't say anything to L. Obviously I'm not a sook. I mean I would tell anyone what was in the interview. I mean we are all friends. And it's not a secret.

So then she made her do her interview on Wednesday.

And then a day after that or whenever it was, she called us in to tell us how it went. And I was actually feeling pretty good, because she said you did really good, and you performed really well but unfortunately you didn't get it.

And I said 'Oh' and I wasn't that disappointed because my first reaction was someone externally got it. Because I know that J hasn't got a clue about it. And I'm thinking, oh well, ok. Someone externally got it. I don't know their background. They could be a rocket scientist.

And she said 'Just to let you know the successful applicant was J. 'Then my jaw hit the floor and my face was in shock.

What! And her response was 'What, are you jealous?' And my response was 'No I'm not jealous. It's f..king wrong. She pulled out of the interview. She rang up and said she didn't want to do it. She comes in, in the morning and asks what it was all about, you know, what sort of questions and I told her'.

And then L said 'Why didn't you tell me? Why should I tell you. It's rigged'. And she was like 'You're jealous'.

'No I'm not jealous. Why would I be jealous? When you said I didn't get the job I thought someone external got it. Someone with more experience. But she doesn't know anything. She doesn't even know the basics'.

So L said 'I'll have to think about what to do'. So she said 'I don't want this getting out until I sort it out'. So she didn't want any of the staff knowing there

> was a big f..kup. But then everyone was saying 'Who got employed, who got the job?'
>
> So we had to wait weeks and weeks. And someone on reception asked me what happened and I told them and they said 'That's wrong'. Even he knew. And that night I was on late shift and I was so devastated. And I was crying.
>
> And L said to J 'I can't give you the job now'. And it was an increase of $10,000. It was like winning Tatts lotto for her.
>
> She said 'I can't give you the job. I have to sort some things out'. She asked J did I give her the questions.
>
> She was still trying to string it out. She said 'We've made our decision we are going to stick with J'. And I just told her straight out 'Well that's bulls..t. And you know what? Don't expect that I'll be doing her work for her'. And she said 'I've told her she needs to come up to speed with everything for the next 2 weeks'. Which never happened. I mean I went around with her and showed her but I knew things were too complex and it would go over her head. Because I told her everything detail and she was going yeah, yeah and taking notes. And she just had no idea. Because I knew that she had no mechanical aptitude. She had no interest in it. You can't have a team leader that has no skills or interest in the area.

Strategies need to be explored so that the pain of not getting the job can be managed in a healing rather that a harmful way. Not getting the job is a common public service experience. The notion of the toxic handler could be a remedy to manage the organisational pain evident in Roger's stories.

Toxic handlers notice others who are in pain (Frost and Robinson, 1999). They have empathy for this condition and they are able and willing to act on what they see and feel is happening. They try to help people suffering, to alleviate their situations. The work of the toxic handler is about responding compassionately to pain in their organisations in order to

minimise, prevent, identify, contain, remove or find ways for people to live with the pain constructively (Frost, 2003, p62.) Toxic handlers can be managers, co-workers or peers.

Toxic handlers are exemplary workers who are distinguished by their empathy and emotional intelligence (Gallos, 2008). The toxic handlers' compassion takes many forms but in essence the toxic handler notices and feels the pain of someone else. Then the toxic handler acts in a way that is intended to help the hurting person heal. The toxic handler can help restore, hope, confidence and even joy (Frost, 2003). Every office needs one. All my participants' stories might have been entirely different if there had been a toxic handler intervention.

A core component of effective toxic handling involves listening to someone else's pain and providing a moment of human connection. Managers who act as handlers consciously take the time to actively connect with a person in pain. Even the act of simply listening to the person's story can help the healing begin. Handlers also know the importance of creating space for others so they can begin to heal (Frost and Robinson, 1999).

Under the best of situations, handling the emotional undercurrents that accompany organisational change and growth takes time, skill and care. The daily pressures of work life, in a sea of disappointment, frustration and complaints encourages fire fighting as a leadership style (Gallos, 2008).

In Roger's case decisions needed to be made in a timely manner. The recruitment practices must be fair and seen to be fair. All policies say that the recruitment practices must be transparent. This is a key difference between private and public service organisations. The recruitment needs to be open. In the public service nothing is supposed to be a secret. Any positions granted or decisions made need to be able to stand up to rigorous investigation.

In Roger's case a new recruitment session was needed with new panel members. A level playing field was needed to be fair and to be seen to be fair. Telling someone they are jealous, is not an example of toxic handling. Rather it is rubbing salt into the wound. This sort of unfairness festers and becomes toxic. The scab never heals and with each perceived disappointment or slight the scab is ripped off, refreshing the pain. Roger's story of pain is not unique, but is an example of public servants grappling with pain and thwarted potential. This is how toxic environments are established, ripe breeding grounds for disenfranchisement.

The next story is from Lisa, an injured worker. From her story you can see that a phone call would have gone a long way in handling both the physical and psychological pain.

> From the moment I hurt my back until the present day I suddenly became a liability. I was difficult.
>
> Everything possible EXCEPT an injured worker.
>
> I was basically ignored.
>
> I was out for 4 months. Not one phone call. No one rang me up.
>
> Just calls from Work Cover. 'Where's your certificate?'
>
> So I spiralled into depression. I thought I would never work again.
>
> I got so depressed. I was invisible. I was in pain.
>
> My employer said the onus is on you as a worker to go and find what your entitlements are. Instead of giving you a package and saying: We injured you, we accept responsibility. Let us help us fix you.

The attitude of the employer only exacerbates and prolongs the issues of the injured worker. It is a false economy to think by hiding a persons' entitlements it will save the department money. In the short and long run the cost of the disenfranchisement to the public service is far greater than providing compassionate support to those public servants injured on the job.

Kelly has a similar story to Lisa. Where the injured public servant is blamed for their injury and treated with suspicion and hostility.

> The injury had caused blood clots to form and I was rushed to hospital. I was there was 3 weeks. I thought I would go mad. The blood clot had travelled to my lungs. I was hooked up to the machine. It was so painful. When I came out I couldn't really go to work. I couldn't stand or sit or lie. I wanted to die. So I went on a graduated return to work. I had an office sent up at home. An occupational health and safety women came out to see me, or check on me.
>
> So she was coming around and trying to catch me out.
>
> But I thought she was going to give me some support not go behind my back and report that I was b...hing. She was saying it in such a way, that it was not a true representation of what I was saying. But they were always trying to catch me out.

From a toxic handling point of view the Occupational Health and Safety woman would have been key to managing both physical and physiological pain in a healing rather than a harmful way. Trying to catch the injured worker out only adds to their suffering and fosters an environment of distrust and toxicity. Not every injured worker is faking it. This approach diminishes the connection people can have to their work. It undermines their ability to live a life of consequence.

It could be expected that in the Human Resource Department you would find a repository of skilled toxic handlers. That has not been the case in the stories of my participants. In fact the notion of compassion is not a characteristic of any of the HR departments in the many public service agencies where my participants worked. The absence of toxic handlers ensured that there were many candidates for this study.

Public service organisations cannot discount the emotions of people at the receiving end of an initiative, intervention or retort. The toxicity that flows from managers who ignore the emotional costs of their actions can poison the well of innovation and goodwill (Frost, 2003).

If the public service aims to recruit the best and boldest thinkers they ignore this warning at their own peril. An organisation cannot operate without good will. And the well of goodwill needs to be full if there is to be innovation.

Workers' pain needs attention to stop the progression into toxicity. The stories of the participants in my study suggests there is a need for the public service to take on toxicity management to create a more compassionate and people friendly organisational culture. Where people have the opportunity to shine.

While in this study there have been many examples of the negative behaviours that lead to disenfranchisement, in the interviews there were examples of managers who managed pain, suffering and disappointment in a helpful way.

## The Compassionate leader

In past chapters the malicious boss, the incompetent boss, the moody boss and the hostile boss have been discussed. Now it is time to examine the compassionate boss and hope that the public service can allow these people to prosper.

The compassionate boss treats people as people not as factors of production (Frost, 2003). According to a 1999 Gallup Poll where 1 million employees were polled people rated a caring boss higher than how much money they earned (Buckingham and Coffman, 1999).The poll highlighted how workers related to their immediate supervisor determined both their productivity and how long they stayed in their job.

It has been the experience of many of my participants that managers in the public service are dispassionate. Displays of emotion are frowned upon. I believe that the culture of the public service encourages public service managers to avoid any emotional connection to colleagues or the work in the name of professionalism. To be a compassionate boss there must be an ability to recognise a person in pain. Rather than just focusing on oneself and the ability to jump a pay grade. Creating or ignoring people's pain disrupts the culture of the organisation, making it dysfunctional, ineffective, and an employment hell. Kelly's description highlights the human violations that occur in the public service.

> I was in so much pain I was crying and crying. And no-one said anything. I don't know if they hated me or thought it wasn't their business. How despicable. It was an open plan office. It broke my heart.

This sort of indifference and toxicity is the scourge of the public service. There should be an emphasis that the public service as an organisation, not just managers or workers, acts in ways that encourage compassion rather than indifference.

It is extremely difficult to be a compassionate boss with toxic handling skills in the public service. Difficult but not impossible. Although many of my participants had more than negative experience there were examples of skilled toxic handling by public service managers. It is of course a shame that it was the exception rather than the rule.

Here, following are examples where managers were able to manage pain and handle toxicity.

> Thank God R spoke to me when he displaced me because I would have thought it was me.
>
> I've worked with you for 6 years as your Quality Manager, I thought you liked me, I thought you thought my work was good. You've sent me Christmas cards saying so. How did this happen? Was I wrong?
>
> So him telling me personally and telling me that it was nothing to do with me, not about the individual or the work; that meant so much to me.

Nicole discussed a good public service supervisor who handled the toxins from above to protect his staff to the detriment of his career and health.

> I had this really good boss at the branch I was working. He was fantastic. He wouldn't do the thing I described. He would work the same shifts as everyone else. He was a good bloke.
> He tried his utmost to look after you but he was being performance managed from the hierarchy.
>
> Thought he was hopeless because he tended to protect the workers rather than act the way managers are suppose to act.
>
> He was the antithesis of what they would want.
>
> *But you thought he was good.*
>
> Yes fantastic. Everyone at the branch. Upfront. He was always upfront, honest, really good. He got performance managed.
>
> Which is bad. Basically gotten rid of. Counselled out of his job.

Lyn discusses a good public service boss who looks after his people again to his career and health detriment.

> Yes because it's people like that with the open management style, it threatens the others who are hard and regimented.
>
> And they really stand out. And it happened again.
>
> At the moment there are 4 Directors. And three are corporate inwardly-looking and it's all about numbers and all about them. The one about collaboration and people having a stake in what is happening, people working to their strengths and collaboration, and inclusive. Well he's the one being ostracised.

Great managers focus on each person's strength and manage around the weaknesses (Buckingham and Coffman, 1999). This seems to be a more effective way to manage the uniqueness of people rather than having them fit into a public service hegemonic mould.

Lily discusses her competent and compassionate public service boss who saved her from a toxic environment. Who was courageous, organised and acted in a way that was 'human'.

> So I got out of the unit because a woman stood up to J and said: we want to take her. That was MR. She wasn't a feminist, just a nice competent woman who really was the best boss I've ever had. Why, because nothing was an emergency. All things were planned. She was a doer not a talker. She would make things happen. She wasn't jealous or trying to climb over you.

And Harry's story of the pragmatic boss, who looked to manage the problem of public service drunkenness.

> And the boss at the time made it quite clear that he didn't approve of drinking at lunch time.
>
> I had decided at that stage that I was not going to drink in work hours at all.
>
> My colleagues, two of which came up with me, decided that wasn't for them. So we had a roster system. The boss didn't want us breathing alcohol on the customers.
>
> If you were on the counter in the afternoon you wouldn't go to the pub at lunch time. So I wouldn't go to the pub all the time, I would just make up for it when I got home.

Nicole speaks about her devastating experience of being a public service manager again to the detriment of her career and health.

> But to be in that management you need to really push another person's agenda.
>
> And they're very critical and it's very us and them.
>
> And I couldn't, and I could not, I couldn't operate like that, like always on the people I work with. You know they're human beings. I couldn't work like that. I just felt really torn. On the one hand I was doing that because I really wanted to help them because there were a few people around that could have been put into that role but would have been really horrible.
>
> I was trying to keep them out of that position. But I was torn because I couldn't actually tell them, the other guys to actually behave in that way. Couldn't stay in it, couldn't say no. So I was doing it for a while and you also get very little support in that role.

Public service managers, who manage, despite the culture, to be compassionate and look after their staff have the gratitude of their employees. Throughout the stories, participants marvelled at their luck to have experienced a good public service boss.

## Attunement

Attunement is an attribute that is developed by co-workers and managers who work with people who are hurting. Attunement manifests itself when a person knows what a particular pain looks and feels like (Frost, 2003).

Attunement is a product of this study. Attunement in research is more quickly achieved when the researcher has gone through the same sorts of suffering as their participants. To be an insider helps with attunement. At the beginning of the work I had little idea of the scope of pain inflicted but now I know it, see it, feel it, understand it.

When a person is attuned to another it allows that person to feel as if they have really been heard. Attunement also leads to the idea that people who have had troubles at work, been depressed, been displaced, been disenfranchised can make the most effective supervisors. This is good news for my participants, because part of their disenfranchisement is that they will never succeed in the public service because they have been marked as mad, bad or sad.

Being marked as mad, bad or sad makes it easier to recognise it in others and help with the situation. Being compassionate from a place of knowing is a powerful tool in improving the lives of people who are suffering at work.

## Chapter Eleven - Findings

No-one is immune from disenfranchisement. Despite someone's demeanour or character at work all people have the propensity to be disenfranchised from their workplace. From the stories of my participants the public service is not an organisation that puts people first.

Problems with working within bureaucracies are not new concepts. Individuals have suffered in these organisations for many decades. Weber (1940s) talks about the 'iron cage' of working in a bureaucracy and Caiden (1991) lists the maladies of bureaupathologies. If these are issues decades old then one would think there would be no need for this study. Despite all the new public service management practices, emotional intelligence workshops and expanding workforce potential, the hierarchies of the 21st century are very similar to the public service of the past sixty years. This study finds there is a need for examining the voices of the disenfranchised public servant to try to stem the encroaching 'polar night of icy darkness'.

It is a finding of this study that the public service is often a humiliating, depressing and abusive place to work. With managers and supervisors treating people without compassion and kindness. With a system that allows the devaluing of workers and does not allow people to live a life of consequence. The public service is often a compromised workplace and in spite of people's best intentions workers find themselves undertaking work they are not proud of.

This study found that the participant public servants really cared about their jobs. They often became disenfranchised because the system would not allow them to meet their potential and undertake work they could feel proud of. My disenfranchised participants became disenfranchised because they cared too much rather than too little. When prolonged employment in the public service means you care less about your job then this is a systemic issue. Prolonged employment should mean increased loyalty and increased

productivity rather than the reverse. One of the ways to survive was not to care anymore because that was the only way to protect oneself physically, mentally and spiritually.

The public service needs passionate people to undertake its' important work but these passionate people are often viewed with suspicion and often burn out because of stress and disenfranchisement. It is not the work that people hate but rather the public service culture that does not allow people to do their best work. Thwarting workers' potential destroys an organisation from within.

The findings in this study found that the individual costs to workers through restructure are devastating not only to the victims but to the survivors. Through restructuring the roots of the public service become compromised and rotten and cannot support the trunk of the public service. Stop restructuring. It is poison to an organisation. Restructuring is a false economy. Any savings in the first instance are lost in thwarted potential, worker's presenteeism, low morale, job dissatisfaction and worker's disenfranchisement.

> Displacing workers in the public service is a waste of resources, a waste of public money and waste of people's efforts. The recruitment practices are absolutely sus. I know they have an independent person and they bulldoze them.
>
> (Wendy, 2010).

More innovative and humane ways to initiate change need to be used.

This study found that sexual harassment is still an issue in the public service. That despite all the policies and training, sexual harassment is still endemic in some public service departments. This study also found that there was no consistency across public service units of what was acceptable behaviour and what was intolerable. For example in one area of the public service sending a pornographic email led to dismissal but receiving fellatio at work was not a sackable offense. In another public service unit touching a person on the behind

was not a sackable offense but when the behaviour was done in another public sector unit this led to the dismissal. Lack of consistency sends a mixed message of what is acceptable and what is not. Leaving victims in the public service feeling abandoned, victimised and unsupported.

This study also found that gender discrimination is still alive in some public service unit. That one's gender still plays a role in gaining promotion, influencing decision making and pay. In the 21st century there is still evident of gender discrimination in the public service workplace.

Public service managers have a serious responsibility. They can destroy people's lives. They can make people physically and mentally ill. Workers must be treated with respect and allowed to have dignity at work. Workers need to save face at work. We must treat public servants in a kind and compassionate way. There needs to be reconciliation between disenfranchised workers and their public service workplaces so it is possible to reconnect with the workplace after suffering disenfranchisement.

With disenfranchisement what happened thirty years ago can affect your working life now. This was found in the process of the 'Immediacy Transfer'. Managers can apologise on behalf of the organisation. Apologies are powerful strategies for humanizing the 'other' and redressing social injustice (Augoustinos, Hastie and Wright, 2011).

Management, HR units and other supervisors can validate the suffering of the disenfranchised public servant. Validation that they have been treated badly. Validation they have been sexually harassed. Validation that it was perfectly reasonable that they were upset at their treatment. That they were not mad, bad or sad. Apology plus validation goes a long way in recovering from disenfranchisement.

This study shows that the disenfranchised public servant should leave their job if they can. This is not as easy as it sounds due to money, family responsibilities, the enticing superannuation, the idea that you will never get another job. However 'life is short'.

> I see old guys waiting for their super. And then they retire and die. Miserable f…..s. There is no way I want a life like that. You want life to mean something. Not just waiting to die.
>
> (Lily, 2010).

> There is nothing worse in life than regret.
> I'm close to the tipping point.
> It's now or never.
>
> (Tom, 2010).

When and if public servants leave their job there needs to be follow up, not only for the individual but for the organisation itself. People who leave the service are valuable sources of knowledge to improve the public service as an employer. When you let people leave organisations after many decades without any acknowledgement it leaves a sour taste in the worker's mouth. With the new public service there is no gold watch at the end. The disenfranchised worker tells others in the community about the lack of respect or acknowledgement that the public service gives their ex-employees. This ripples throughout the community.

> Well I wrote an email that said 'I quit'. And that was it. No phone call, no nothing. After 23 years in the public sector I wrote an email that said I quit and that was it. No letter of appreciation. Nothing. 23 years is a long time to work.
>
> (Lily, 2010).

Undertaking insider research is a way to get to the heart of organisational dysfunction. Insider research allows access to hidden populations and allows a truth to be uncovered.

Not the dominant truth but truth at the margins, where voices are often silenced. Marginalised workers need to have their voices heard to improve workplaces.

The outcomes of this study are not optimistic. The findings are pessimistic. Workers are fragile. To bounce back with rigour and enthusiasm from workplace disenfranchisement is very difficult. There are public servants being disenfranchised every day.

# Chapter Twelve - Conclusion

The focus of this research was to hear the stories of disenfranchised public servants. This study is a snapshot of the working lives of disenfranchised people in the public service in the 21st century. The quotes in blue demonstrate the longevity of the issues that have plagued the public service throughout the decades. This unconventional approach is to draw attention to these issues.

My initial question for this study was:

**What are the experiences of disenfranchised workers within the public service?**

The experiences of individuals are important tales to tell. Workers' experiences are an important contemporary issue. When workers feel that their workplace environment does not allow them to reach their full potential then workers just survive in a demoralised, half-hearted mode with no motivation except a pay cheque (Gardner, 2006).

Improving the working life of individuals is an important and powerful endeavour. This study is important because it adds to the body of knowledge that allows people to lead a life of consequence through their work and enable people to bounce back from adversity with renewed vigour.

Research involving the analysis of the lived experience allows for a transformation of consciousness and heightened perceptions both for the participant and researcher (Van Manen, 1990). Listening to and telling of peoples' stories can be a contribution to struggles for social justice in ways that could be useful to both the participants and researcher (Lather, 2007).

There are over one million public servants in Australia. When the public service fails to provide adequate services or an environment where workers can engage in high quality, socially responsible and meaningful work then all our lives tangibly suffer.

In undertaking this study it has become apparent that few people are immune from workplace disenfranchisement. My participants were extroverts, introverts and everywhere in between. They were young and older, they were experienced and inexperienced they had families and friends and work colleagues. The thing they had in common was disenfranchisement. And this state ripples throughout their lives and the lives of those around them.

This study looked at many facets of disenfranchisement. The disenfranchisement of the injured worker; the disenfranchisement of the bullied and ostracized; the disenfranchisement of public servants who were victims of sexual harassment and violence at work. The public servants whose continued exposure to daily incivilities led to disenfranchisement; the disenfranchisement resulting from displacement and restructuring; the disenfranchisement of those who are deemed mad, bad or sad.

This study aims to add to the body of knowledge around researching the voices of disenfranchised workers, public servants and the effects that bureaucracies have on individuals. This conclusion aims to situate my work in the context of research on bureaucracies and their effects on individuals. For many decades bureaucracies have long been perceived as soul destroying and dehumanising. There is a reason for this; as my participants know, as I know. This for me is cause for despair.

> *You will never understand bureaucracies until you understand that for bureaucrats procedure is everything and outcomes are nothing.*
>
> *Thomas Sowell quotes (American Writer and Economist, b.1930)*

My study looks to add to the body of knowledge around a variety of areas. Qualitative research, organisational studies and workers' issues by documenting the voices of twenty disenfranchised public servants.

## Insider research and the contest for credibility

The chapter, *Contest for Creditability* looks to qualitative research to find the essence of people. To construct a truth based on people's experience. To this end a phenomenological approach was used. The phenomenon is the experiences of disenfranchisement in the Australian Public Service in the 21st century. This study is conducted by an insider. Someone who has suffered being disenfranchised from the public service. It gives a unique flavour to the study with all its biases and empathy and sympathy that a fellow sufferer may have. A subjective view. A study that is personal because it is about colleagues and friends, and friends of friends. It explores what that means for the researcher and hopes to encourage others to expose insider knowledge of injustice or suffering and to shine a light on the issue. This type of research allows for passionate voices to be heard and challenge the dispassionate voices of third party, objective observers of the human condition. The insider perspective with a passionate voice aims to breathe life into the words of the participants, to show vibrantly the themes and issues that are uncovered. Unlike the preferred dispassionate style of the public service there needs to be passionate voices in research to uncover the truth from another point of view and breathe passion into the research agenda. It is my premise that you can only find the truth through a close connection and empathy and a deep personal knowledge of your participants' experiences. Not just through book learning but through experience and intimacy with the subject matter.

## Immediacy Transfer

This study also looks at the phenomenon of the 'Immediacy Transfer'. This is where critical incidents which have happened months or years or decades are still fresh in the aggrieved person's narrative, demonstrated by changing the tense of their story from the past to the present tense. This pinpoints the kernel of a person's distress. This shows that when issues are not dealt with in an effective and timely way the repercussions ripple throughout the public servants' careers, even for thirty years. This has an impact on the system, the individual and the individual's colleagues and families. Unresolved workers' issues resulted in the 'Immediacy Transfer'. Discontent can fester and lead to disenfranchisement. This adds to the body of knowledge in organisational studies that look for ways to improve the lives of workers and improve the efficiency of the public service to better serve the community.

## Snowballing and purposive sampling

Snowballing techniques can produce a robust and large group of information rich participants who would not usually be available for research. The snowballing technique meant that all participants were willing to tell their stories and had thought about their feelings, their circumstances and their reactions. In short they were experts in their own narrative. With the combination of narratives, commonalities arose. This study also highlights the rewards of using a purposive sampling strategy as it gave me a range of would be participants. Targeting a group of people who had expressed their disenfranchisement commenced this study. The participants had a story to tell and were willing to tell it.

These approaches to research will hopefully encourage others to study what they know best. What they experience, what they live and what they see. And not be discouraged by demands for objective, third party, at arm's length research that the academy normally

expects and validates. The participants' stories are the link between theory and reality of working in the public service bureaucracy.

## The nature of work

*The Nature of Work* adds to the body of knowledge that examines work for individuals. This study is strongly influenced by the *Good Work Project* (Gardner, 2004, 2005, 2006). This project interviewed more than a thousand people to determine what constitutes 'good work' and what constitutes 'compromised work'. It also explores what organisational circumstances add or distract from an individual's ability to fulfil their work aspirations. Most people wish to lead a life of consequence. This study demonstrates what can happen when the workplace does not allow people to achieve this.

There is a plethora of research on the supervisor/employee relationship. However this study adds to the knowledge from the workers' point of view. Many of my participants suffered at the hands of their supervisors echoing the research from the past decades. Maybe by the 22$^{nd}$ century the public service will be a place of work where the reality genuinely reflects the values and missions statements produced by HR and PR consultants.

By hearing and documenting the voices of disenfranchised workers researchers, policy makers and managers can look at what really counts for people at a very stressful time of their working life. With this knowledge there may be the ability to stop the stress and suffering from stretching out to years or decades.

There have been criticisms that my participants may have been dysfunctional before they worked for the public service. This could well be true. But working in the public service certainly added to their suffering. If the public service could only recruit people with their acts together, no personal problems, strong mental health, and resilience then maybe there

would be no need for this study. Unfortunately there are few populations that could only staff their public service with such super employees. There is criticism it was not work that has made my participants mad, bad or sad. In most of my participants' stories work was catastrophic in their lives. Work can add to people pain or improve it. If the public service aimed to improve the lives of workers who had become disenfranchised then there would be increased productive and commitment to work because fundamentality we all want a life of consequence through our work. It is more effective to motivate and empower people than to treat workers as unable to think for themselves, untrustworthy or incompetent, undermine the very motivation and adaptability on which real work success depends.

Workers' views are often absent in the literature around workplaces. This study makes workers' views the central part of the discussion. It is the starting place where discussion and conclusions emanate.

> Bureaucracy is the death of all sound work.
>
> Albert Einstein

## The Personality of Tyranny

Bullying still exists in the public service workplace. In the chapter *The Personality of Tyranny* more than bullying is examined. It is a range of behaviours that leave competent and forthright people crippled, damaged, and lost.

Although bullying is still a hot topic this chapter goes further than bullying. It shows the range and impact a host of behaviours has on individuals. And this treatment leads to disenfranchisement and disengagement from employment.

The chapter also starts to explore the problematic nature of the supervisor-worker relationship and when that relationship goes awry things become impossible for the workers. Public service managers should not have the power, ability or inclination to destroy someone's aspirations, working lives or mental health.

A long list of bureaupathologies is also compiled to expose that bullying and other such behaviours have been classified and coded for many decades. Along with an examination of bureaupathologies, an examination of Weber (1940s) is useful in tying my work into the historical and theoretical realm of bureaucracy research.

Weber (1947) saw bureaucracy characterised by strict hierarchy. Resources are assigned from the top to officials and offices. Hierarchy involves a highly articulation division of labour and strict and uniform discipline and control over the personnel. This hierarchy is 'monocratic'. Its apex is one person, not a college. He saw people in the bureaucracy subjected to impersonal rules. Weber discussed this in the forties.

Treating people impersonally is not the way to make harmonious working relations. The public servants in my study still felt the impersonal sting of public services policies and procedures. While recognising bureaucracy as the most efficient form of organisation, and even indispensable for the modern state, Weber also saw it as a threat to individual freedoms, and the ongoing bureaucratization as leading to a "polar night of icy darkness", in which increasing rationalization of human life traps individuals in the 'iron cage' of bureaucratic, rule-based, rational control (Ritzer,2004). Many of my participants felt not only the polar night but the polar winter trapped in the 'iron cage' of their public service employment.

Rational calculation reduces every worker to a cog in this bureaucratic machine and, seeing himself in this light, he will merely ask how to transform himself… to a bigger cog… The passion for bureaucratization at this meeting drives us to despair (Weber, 1947). My study adds to this discussion because it explores the cost to individuals. Thwarted potential, unhappiness, poor physical health, poor mental health, addiction and despair.

In the 21st century bureaucracies such as the public service seemed not to have changed in any real way. Not from the organisations my participants worked in. Bureaucracy hides what it knows and does from criticism (Weber, 1947). My study critiques the actions of people working within the public service bureaucracy. My study also continues to highlight the 'iron cage' mentality of supervisors and the system for the Australian public service.

Foucauldian perspectives have sought to emphasise the way in which individual subjectivities and identities are constructed and reconstructed through discourses operating within the workplace. These insights highlight the way in which employees are made as they construct their identity in relation to and very often in opposition to dominant corporate discourses (Cater, 2002).

Foucault states than knowledge is power. By giving power to the participants' narratives knowledge is generated. This study makes the knowledge generated by the experiences of disenfranchised public servants explicit.

> Knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of 'the truth' but has the power to make itself true. All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has effects, and in that sense at least, 'becomes true.' Knowledge, once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraints, regulation and the disciplining of

> practice. Thus, 'there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations (Foucault, 1977, 27).

Truth is not a fixed and unchanging content and is not the province of a privileged few. Truth can be acquired by anyone through exercise involving choices of action within their own specific, historical, social and cultural setting (O'Farrell, p 83).

> Every revolution evaporates and leaves behind only the slime of a new bureaucracy.
>
> Franz Kafka quotes (German Writer of visionary fiction, 1883-1924)

## Scourge of Professionalism

Many people think that professionalism is a preferred state. This study argues that professionalism is a wall where many inhumane practices can hide behind. In many of my participants' stories they experienced 'professionalism' as a process that disenfranchised and disempowered. It was in the professional realm that managers and supervisor lost their ability to act humanely. There are examples of enacting harm and intentional cruelty. In a bureaucracy a characteristic of professionalism is to treat everyone the same. To deal with people without emotion. The flaw in this approach is that not everyone is the same. In life we do not treat people the same. Peoples' successful relationships are based on individuals. Not some template of management. I know what I am suggesting is a burden on managers. But if you become a manager you need to manage people in a way that encourages peoples' potential and not harms them. This was not the trend for the people in my study.

Professionalism can be a way to distance oneself from the harm that is being inflicted. Professionalism can be the excuse to not act in humane and kind ways. All workers' deserve individual attention and the right to be treated with respect and dignity at work.

## Saving money, losing souls

*Saving Money, Losing Souls*, examines the cost of restructuring to individuals. The alleged aim of a restructure is to save money and improve the efficiency of the public service. But

the human costs are too high as demonstrated in my participants' stories. This study examined the cost to individuals who have been displaced and made redundant from their positions but not from their employment. It examines the waste of potential and productivity that restructuring causes. Not only for the people who have suffered restructuring but those that witness the restructure and have to share workplaces with those that are still employed but do not have a jobs. It gives voice to those who have experienced restructure. Their stories add to the examination of the human toll of restructuring.

Restructuring can have a profound adverse effect on workers' heath and well being. There has been a link from downsizing to poorer mental health outcomes, bullying and other forms of occupational violence (Quinlan, 2007).

Employment security has been a major positive characteristic for working in the public service. Continual restructuring destabilises this sense of security. Undermining workers' efforts, eroding trust in the organisation and long term pursuit of goals.

The public service is always in a state of restructure. The restructure in the public service is so common they are given names like hurricanes. Recently a public service agency called their restructure; *Moving Forward toward the 21st century*. Despite all the documentation around restructuring by departments and by unions the process often seems to be punitive. Trouble makers are moved on and managers gain greater spans of control with pay increases. Maybe the next restructure of the public service could be called; *Moving the deck chairs on the Titanic.*

## Thwarted potential

*Thwarted Potential* explores the notion of people not being able to do their best work or barely adequate work in their public servant jobs. With thwarted potential comes lack of motivation, poor job satisfaction and often poor job performance.

It is important to realise the cost of thwarted potential for individuals, for the public service and for society. Examination of the effect of thwarting a worker's potential is important because it examines how people can lead a life of consequence through their work. This allows the study to add to Gardner's work in the *Good Work Project*.

Workers cannot be expected to be at the top of their game if their potential has been thwarted time and time again. Thwarted potential has not only immediate effects, but impacts on the future working experience of the individual, where they continue to bear the scars and the residue for past injustices. The road to recovery is often slow and long. Sometimes the ambition to reach that potential is an aspiration gone forever. A fatality of public service employment.

The sad bedfellow of this fatality is often silence. Workers' views are frequently missing in discussions of the contemporary workplace and yet the importance of these words and their meaning within the context of the organisation is unquestionable. This examination of twenty disenfranchised public servants' perceptions allows these voices to be heard and in doing so it highlights a disturbing trend in the public service - one of disenfranchisement that is going unheralded and unheard in the current culture that is the modern public service.

> Join in the new game that's sweeping the country. It's called 'Bureaucracy'. Everybody stands in a circle. The first person to do anything loses - anonymous

## More than just bad behaviour

*More than Just Bad Behaviour* demonstrates the existence of problematic workplaces, hostile working environments and disrupted workers' lives through the actions of individuals whose behaviours is unacceptable. It also focuses on the organisations that allow this to happen despite the application of EEO and policies on workplace harassment.

This work looks at how the workplace environment affects the very core of individuals. The policy driven cultural development of the public service seems to be at odds with the experiences of the target groups that these policies report to protect, include and promote (Day, 2007).

Despite 20 years of legislation in Australia it appears that sexual harassment is on the rise (Young, 2004). Literature around the effects of sexual harassment is useful in building a profile of issues that affect workers. This literature is also useful in describing the hostile working conditions that are still apparent in my participants' stories despite a decade of anti harassment policies and programs.

The literature on workplace bullying and mobbing in the public service is useful in positioning my study. The International Labour Organisation has extended the definition of workplace violence to include passive and psychological acts. The damage caused includes post traumatic stress syndrome, premature death, suicide and homicide (Shallcross, 2003). Shallcross's research explores bullying and mobbing in the Australian public service and how this contributes to a toxic workplace. Again despite a decade of anti bullying policies, bullying seems to be an issue in the public service.

The literature around the psychological impacts of workplaces is pivotal in this study. According to Marchand (2005) in his research with 9,501 workers, occupation and

“pathogenic” work organisations contribute to psychological distress. He claims that mental health problems in the workplace have reached major proportions.

This chapter highlights that despite decades of Equal Employment Opportunity, valuing diversity and sexual harassment policies and procedures, there is still extremely bad behaviour occurring in public service units. This study showed it was not just a few rouge people that behave badly in the public service workplace. The extent of this behaviour is widespread.

## Pain and Toxicity

*Pain and Toxicity* explores workers’ pain and how that can progress into toxicity. A toxic public service leads to dysfunctional organisations and dysfunctional individuals.

This study highlights that the public service is often not an enlighten place to work and that for the participants in my study this led to disenfranchisement. That despite the competence, character or work ethic of staff, important works needs to be achieved in the public service. All people have a range of strengths and weaknesses. It is important that managers work to strengths and manage around weaknesses. This study shows the public service can wreck people’s life or make suffering worse. It can cause dysfunctionality or increase it.

One of the issues that my participants had in common was that they were dysfunctional at work, because of work or through work. If their dysfunctional behaviour was part of their nature then those that left would still be dysfunctional in their new jobs. The people who have left the public service report a much better working and personal life. The people who participated in the study who had left the public service appeared ‘happy’. Maybe that happiness will not last however the people still in the public service who stayed despite their disenfranchisement report no period of happiness. This looks at the question of

whether one should stay at work even if one is unhappy. It also explores the notion that happiness should or should not be a characteristic of work. When you can ignite peoples' passion with their working lives then good morale and job satisfaction becomes achievable. Although there are 'happiness at work movements', this is not the way of the public service. Happiness is not a major priority in the workplaces that my participants worked in. The image of the happy public service is not a stereo-type that is prevalent. More a dour and unhappy automated half alive person shuffling off to their boring jobs in grey cardigans. My participants did not enjoy happiness at work.

## The best and the brightest

The public service has always claimed that it aims to recruit and keep the best and the brightest.

One of the common themes in the interviews was that these were passionate people wanting to do an extraordinary job, who were all hindered by the system. Any strong emotion, especially passion, was viewed with suspicion, as the public service professional was expected to be 'dispassionate'. Being dispassionate makes for a two-dimensional colleague, supervisor, or peer, who cannot meet the complex messiness and intricacies of 21st century public service life.

Being a public servant professional and being passionate about the job seems to be incongruous. To get the best out of people and ensure the vibrancy of the workplace, ignition of peoples' passion should be a priority. When peoples' passion and work are united, real differences can occur.

One of the greatest paradoxes in this research is perhaps the extent to which a passionate person's disillusionment and disenfranchisement and thwarted potential occurs as a result of a system that itself desperately needs passionate people to carry out its important work.

Certainly one of my hopes for this study was that when people read it they would relate to it in some way. This happened to me, my partner, my neighbour, there could be some universality to the issues that have been discussed.

In conclusion, the participants in the study felt that their careers were over. However these participants would hopefully make more compassionate public service managers because they have walked a mile in the disenfranchised shoes.

## Chapter Twelve - Solutions

Solutions to disenfranchisement were not a major component of the study. Rather it was a snap shot of disenfranchised public servants in Australia in the 21st century. However throughout the study some possible solutions were explored.

Zest is an important aspect in increasing workers' satisfaction with their jobs. All my participants lacked zest. I can never remember a time in my public service career when I bounded out of bed full of zest. There was no expectation that you would be enthusiastic about your job. The public service, in my experience and the experiences of my participants demonstrates a culture that is suspicious of enthusiasm and does not aim to generate zest in their workers. A cultural shift is needed if the public service is to sustain a zestful workplace. Maybe young people entering the service will be able to bring about this change.

The public service should aim to be a worker friendly organisation. Throughout the decades this has not been the priority for the public service. In the 21st century people expect there to be some consideration of them as individuals and how work negatively impacts on their lives. There is a disconnect between policies and the reality of working in the public service from the stories of my participants. Private sector employment seems to have pushed the worker friendly environment as a way to increase productivity and therefore have a competitive edge. If the public service wishes to maintain its' talent, a push to create worker friendly environments need to receive a higher priority. This could be achieved through putting this type of measure into the Senior Executive Service Key Performance Indicators and demonstrations of this should be part of the promotion process.

The identification of toxic handlers in the organisation, whether peers or managers, could help the public service address the issue of pain. Like sin eaters[13] of old they could help people manage their situations. This could be a way for the public service to manage pain in a helpful rather than harmful way.

There is no doubt that this study demonstrated that public service supervisors need to have people skills. They must genuinely like people, possess communication skills and have empathy and compassion. This should be a recruitment priority. The idea of seniority has been phased out of the public service but what has replaced it has been managers who have harmed people. People should come first and even at the risk of sounding trite, people in the public service are its most valuable resource. There needs to be care around how we treat those that work in the public service.

[13] The term sin-eater refers to a person who would take on by means of food and drink the sins of a household, often because of a recent death thus absolving the soul and allowing that person to rest in peace.

There does need to be training in acting humanely and compassionately at work. These qualities need to be recognised as essential for public service managers. This will need a cultural shift.

Human Resource units need to be instrumental in improving the working lives of public servants. There needs to be a balance in HR departments that workers have their voices heard and believed rather than just managers. HR departments should not engage in punitive measures.

Restructuring in the public service has a profound effect on the people who lose their position but not their employment and also has an effect on those of who witness this process. It is arguable that any money is saved through restructuring. The public service should avoid restructuring and adopt a more humane way to treat staff to improve efficiency and job satisfaction. When people are satisfied with their jobs, efficiency improves. To make the public service a better place to work should be a government and societal priority. If workers' situations are improved then there should be a flow on effect for the people who rely on the public service for services, which in essence, is all of us.

## Chapter Fourteen - Recommendations for future research

It is extremely important to continue to research workers' stories. Through snowballing I had the potential to research hundreds of public servants with stories of disenfranchisement. For the sake of improved public services the issues around unhappy workers need to be continually researched.

In juxtaposition to my study, it would be interesting to pinpoint what are the conditions that provide the opportunity to reach one's potential at work and incubate happy public servants.

Examinations of what makes a good public service manager would improve workers' lives. Some of my participants had examples of good public servant managers but the stories were few and far between. And for me their 'good' was barely adequate but the bar was set low for managers in the public service.

Further research is needed into how to bring passion back into the profession. A passionate public service would serve the public better. There needs to be future investigation into disenfranchised public servants through cases before the courts and Anti-Discrimination Boards.

Researchers should be encouraged to write about what they know and live not just what they study. Public servants and ex-public servants need to continue to examine and analyse their workplaces in the hope of improving the lives of workers.

The experience of undertaking this study has been a joyous one. Although as you read the study joy may not have been the emotion that comes to mind. I wish there was a job that chronicles the stories of disenfranchised workers. By unmuting the voices of the disenfranchised worker could be my opportunity to live a life of consequence through my work.

# Chapter Fifteen - Postscript

## Abby

Abby left her public service job, with loss of pay but with her life intact. What a loss to the public that such a competent and committed practitioner would leave our public service. And the culture of exclusion continues in her ex public service unit.

## Alex

Alex left her public service job with a payout. She had no difficulty gaining employment elsewhere. She used her pay out for a deposit on an apartment. I am glad there is a happy ending for a public servant that was offered a job in the kitchen as a replacement position for administrative job.

## Carol

Carol has left her sexually charged public service organisation. She has found another job. But often you cannot leave your baggage behind. She still mistrusts men in her workplace and often feels passed over for opportunities. But in her new job she does not have to embarrassed or ashamed and witness her ex lover workplace lothario work his 'magic' on others.

## Cathy

Cathy who had some much invested in her workplace eventually left her job.

Cathy finally had enough of her boss that demotivated, dismissed and disgruntled.

When she finally quit, her selfish boss said to her:

*I'm not surprised. I like your shoes!*

## Harry

Harry is still not working but is aiming to return to work. Still is determined to return to his public service role but still too emotionally and psychologically unfit. Harry just waits to get better and get back to work. Still a long journey to travel.

## Jane

Jane left her brutalising and hostile public service job. To great financial difficulties. But got her life back, bit by bit. Found her hope, lost her weight, her personality returned. However it still smarts and her experience at work has changed her fundamentality. The ripple still continues after years. She now works in Domestic Violence. Happy to be away for the abuse. Ironic.

## Janelle

Janelle is still in her public service job. So young, so stressed. She feels she is in an impossible situation. Her potential drains out as she continues to go to a place where she is bored, where she trusts no one and she tries to cover her back. Not the experiences we would wish for our young people working in the public service.

## Jessie

Jessie finally left her public service job. The micromanagement became too much. But leaving was the best decision for her. She now has a job where she is appreciated and left to achieve her goals in her own way.

## Kelly

Kelly is permanently disabled from her public service bonding exercise. She cannot really move. She is housebound. In enormous pain. She can't sleep, sit or lay down. She is over 200 kilos. Her life has been profoundly changed and shortened through the injuries caused at work. She is now on a disability pension. She is bitter, depressed and angry. Such a sad story of an uncaring bureaucracy who destroyed the active life of an individual.

## Lily

Please find below Lily's happy story.

> Well I wrote an email that said 'I quit'. And that was it. No phone call, no nothing. After 23 years in the public service I wrote an email that said I quit and that was it. I never thought it was going to be that easy. What an anti-climax end to my story. I have never felt such joy, such elation. What was wrong with me? Why did I have so much fear? Why didn't I quit 5 years ago? People say 'What about your super?' Who gives a f..k about my super? What I would be dead with a good super scheme. I see old guys waiting for their super. And then they retire and die. Miserable f..kers. There is no way I want a life like that. You want life to mean something. Not just waiting to die.
>
> Now I am an ex-public servant and the world smells good again.

## Lisa

Lisa is still an injured worker in her public service unit. She has returned to work on light duties. Her back hurts, her soul hurts. She is in a world of pain both physically and psychologically. But she has a family to support and leaving is not an option.

## Lyn

Lyn still works in the public service. Her hold on her psychiatric health is precarious. I beg her to leave but she has six children and needs the pay. She is so caught up in the misery she

cannot see the possibilities outside the service. I worry about her ability to continue to turn up to a place that tortures her emotionally and psychologically. The pain and suffering is immense and ongoing.

And the author of this study has left her public service job. Alive, just and now spends her time writing about ex-colleagues who still suffer in the halls of the public service.

## Nicole

Nicole left her public service job she didn't trust. She has another job and she is happy. She still resents her experience as she tried to fit in by compromising herself and her integrity. Not something she would do anytime again soon. But a happy ending. A job where there is trust and her competence is appreciated.

## Robyn

Robyn has at last secured a permanent position in another government department. At last redeployed, off the displaced list. After all those years her sense of security has been restored. However her current public service unit is going through a restructure. Surely displacement cannot hit the same person twice. We wait to see.

## Roger

Roger is still in his toxic public service job. Hating every minute of it. So distressed and demotivated. Nothing changing in his work world and his boredom is palpable. He isolates himself because of his misery. It surrounds him like a cloak. Not improving his situation but he can see no way out because there is twenty years left on his mortgage and there are few opportunities to liberate his life, except winning tatts lotto.

## Rose

Rose, the disability worker and advocate has left her job. What a catastrophe for the vulnerable people in her care. But people with passion and high standards cannot work in her area. She is retraining into another profession. All that experience, all that expertise leaking out the public service. A disaster in so many ways.

## Sally

Still a public servant caught in the superannuation trap. Too young to retire. Too old to lose all that super. Going to work miserable, letting that misery fall out to the rest of her life. Everyday a struggle to get out bed. And five years to go before retirement. What a wretched way to end your working life.

## Sharon

Sharon after all her trauma and suffering is still in her public service job. But to survive she has had to change her entire ethos.

> But I just don't want to be involved anymore. I would never, never get involved again. I will never be the martyr again.
>
> But now I don't give a f..k about it. And I put my neck on the line. And no one backed me up.
>
> Never again! Never again!

Shut down to survive or go mad. Life in the Australian public service.

## Tom

After 28 years in the Public Service, Tom went to university and got a new career. He is engaged and about to be married.

He was eventually sacked from his public service job, for abandonment of employment.

After leaving his public service job, perceived security and his excellent superannuation package, the whole world opened up for him. He found job satisfaction, he found happiness, he found love.

## Wendy

Wendy took medical retirement. She sold her house and moved states. She left a high level public service job to save her life.

A breast cancer survivor but not a public service survivor. Her wounds from her public service job are still as fresh and painful and her scars from her mastectomy. Both are intertwined and leaves this individual damaged and resentful.

# Reflections

## More than twenty.

Reflections for a post PHD candidature is fraught with issues and regrets and insecurities. Everywhere you look you are surrounded by disenfranchised public servants. This could be a common PHD side effect. I suppose the best advice would be to remove yourself into a cave so you cannot hear or read the news in the weeks leading up to your submission. But rather in this reflection I wish to demonstrate the relevance of my study for today and tomorrow. Although disenfranchised public servants date back to Weber in 1947, I wish to show my study can be extrapolated to 'more than twenty'.

Every week another public service scandal is reported which highlights inappropriate public service behaviours and the inability of the public service to manage these events. It would seem amiss of me not to mention these in my study. To show that more than the twenty people who participated in my study are suffering. Public servant suffering is well documented in the media and in court cases – Abandon hope all who enter. It suggests that this study may never end because like taxes and death public servants will always become disenfranchised.

In the final weeks of my thesis the WorkSafe scandal broke. WorkSafe is the Victorian government department in charge of stopping workplace bullying and harassment in the public services. However it has come to light that WorkSafe has a culture of extreme bullying. It seems ironic and adding to the 'truth' of this study that the bullying watchdog is charged with bullying. I wish the Public Service could just stop 'more than just bad behaviour' for a short period so I can submit my PHD. But that is the point. There are always issues in the public service concerned with bullying or harassment or fraud or corruption.

According to *The Age* (11/10/2011), Jillian Ramsden was sacked hours after she lodged a compensation claim for bullying at WorkSafe. She is taking her case to Fair Work Australia. Her comments are reminiscent of my participants. 'I don't think I ever felt more isolated in my entire life. It is a very toxic, cold, hard place and I suspect it comes from the top'.

Other employees of WorkSafe said, 'We witnessed a culture of fear. People were intimidated in meetings. One a day to day level, people were in tears constantly'.

(The Age, 11/10/2011)

These comments have a sense of déjà vu from my participants. Who watches the watchdogs of bullying and harassment in the public service? A government department with this core activity should be an exemplary place to work not a 'toxic work environment'.

My study looked at twenty disenfranchised public servants but on reflection, to show there are more than just twenty disenfranchised public servants, to defend the mental health of my participants, to use secondary evidence that my participants were not mad, bad or sad I undertook a scan of actual cases from the Anti Discrimination Board to see if my study could be applied to 'more than just twenty'. A search and analysis of industrial tribunal and court proceedings was undertaken to identify cases where appalling public service behaviour was involved. There are hundreds of cases in front of the tribunal.

## Cases from the Anti - discrimination Board

I have chosen a range of cases heard in front of the *Anti-Discrimination Board* (referred to as the Tribunal). An analysis of these cases adds to the robustness of data from the stories of my participants. It is a way to gather more data than from the twenty participants.

Among other things they highlight the harassment that women still experience now in male dominated fields in the public service.

Four cases have been chosen for discussion;

*Kim Hunt V RailCorp [2007]*

*Lawrence V Commissioner of Police [2010]*

*Raymond Sewell V NSW Police Force [2008*I]

*Apps v Roads and Traffic Authority of New Wales* [2007].

These cases were chosen because of their ability to demonstrate that sexual harassment, gender harassment, violence and hostile working environments prevail in the public service.

It is interesting to note the type of language used to normalise the most inappropriate workplace behaviour. There is the use of 'legalese' to dampen the impact. The way incidents are represented appears somehow less outrageous than the real thing. One example of this dampening effect is seen in *Lawrence v Commissioner of Police* (2010) where the act of opening drinks with his 'Prince Albert' (a ring pierced into a penis) is referred to as the 'impugned conduct.' The 'impugned behaviour' certainly does not give any indication of the effect on individuals when a colleague opens drinks with his pierced penis.

I especially use *Kim Hunt V RailCorp (2007)* because it is through the transcripts of her case that a real example of sexual harassment, gender harassment and a hostile working environment is played out within the Australian Public Service.

## Kim Hunt V RailCorp (2007)

In *Kim Hunt v RailCorp (2007)* all that is rotten, unfair, harassing and demeaning is played out.

Kim Hunt experienced sexual harassment, gender harassment, workplace violence, a hostile work environment and exposure to abuse. The pain of the plaintiff becomes evident. The cumulative effect of her workplace harassment is overwhelming. Harassed, victimised, demeaned. The story of a woman in a public service male stronghold.

It is very unfortunate that the plaintiff was called Kim Hunt. This gave some very unimaginative harassers the opportunity to call her c..t, graffiti her name as c..t and send her pictures of c..ts. Kim Hunt's harassment was vicious and overt. No perpetrators were disciplined, although they were named.

Kim Hunt was sexually harassed.

> The Tribunal finds that, although the graffiti was written in the male toilets, its purpose was to humiliate and harass Ms Hunt by creating an environment in which male staff would see the graffiti that demeaned Ms Hunt. The Tribunal also finds that the person or persons responsible for the graffiti would have expected that, given the nature of the antagonistic environment in the workplace, Ms Hunt would eventually be made aware of its existence and would therefore be affected the same way she would have had the graffiti been written in a more public space.
>
> Specifically, the first, second, third and fifth instances (on the 31 May 2004, 9 July 2004, 4 March 2004 and 13 September 2005 respectively) of graffiti cumulatively had the effect of amounting to sexual harassment of Ms Hunt. It constituted a clear and continuing pattern of behaviour that, targeting Ms Hunt, clearly led to her being humiliated and denigrated. Kim Hunt's reporting of her sexual harassment was received with little support. The organisational response was to move the complainant.

Kim Hunt suffered gender harassment. Her case encapsulates everything that can go awry in public service employment.

> Ms Hunt claimed that the behaviour of RailCorp employees caused her to suffer discrimination in the terms and conditions of her employment on the basis of her gender. Specifically, Ms Hunt claimed that her complaints were not investigated as promptly and effectively as complaints by male employees, she was consistently being pressured to move to another position that was lower than the one she currently had, that her performance was not reviewed when it should have been, that she was directed to move to other premises, that male colleagues were paid more money than she was, that false complaints were made about her by male colleagues and that would not have occurred if she were male.
>
> A claim of sex discrimination requires Ms Hunt to show that she was treated less favourably than a male would have been in the same circumstances and that the grounds of that less favourable treatment was on the grounds of her sex. She must also show that she suffered a detriment as a result of this less favourable treatment.

The Tribunal found that Kim Hunt did not suffer from gender discrimination. Although it does appear that when you get paid less than your male colleagues, your complaints are not investigated or treated seriously, no increment gained, pressured to leave your substantive position, shown pornography, had graffiti written about you, talked about your perceived incompetence on talk back radio, that there could be a case of gender harassment to be answered.

In *Kim Hunt V RailCorp* there is certainly evidence of a hostile working environment. The Tribunal identifies that this public service unit was a hostile working environment not only for the complainant but the rest of the staff.

> Ms Hunt asserted that she found herself in a hostile work environment that was created by the cumulative effect of the incidents of graffiti that targeted her

personally, the failure of management to deal with her complaints in a timely manner, the failure of management to conduct her performance review, the incident with the pornographic magazine, the talkback radio incident and the continual pressure on her to move to another position outside of the Centre.

There is no doubt that Ms Hunt genuinely felt that the atmosphere within the workplace was stressful and that she felt that she was unfairly targeted and targeted because she was a woman.

However, other evidence was presented to the Tribunal that showed that the general view of management was that there were serious staffing issues within the Centre that related to the way in which the unit was managed and the tensions between staff.

On the basis of the evidence presented to it, the Tribunal draws the conclusion that the oppressive and dysfunctional nature of the workplace was a result of the management, organisational and staffing issues that existed in the Centre. In this environment, it is understandable that Ms Hunt felt that she was being targeted. However, the evidence showed that the environment was such that other staff members were equally unhappy and frustrated in the work environment.

Kim Hunt's claim that she suffered because of a hostile working environment was not found to be valid on the basis that all the staff suffered in a hostile working environment.

In the end the Tribunal made the following orders:

1. That the complaints of sex discrimination be dismissed.
2. That the complaints of victimisation be dismissed.
3. That the complaints of aiding and abetting be dismissed.
4. That the complaints of sexual harassment be upheld to the extent that they relate to the graffiti incidents of 31 May 2004 and 9 July 2004 and the magazine incident of February 2005.
5. That the Respondent pays the Applicant $20,000 as damages.

So in the end only the sexual harassment was upheld despite the compelling evidence of gender discrimination and hostile working environment. These findings do not encourage others to come forward even though they may have compelling evidence to support their disenfranchising experiences.

## Lawrence v Commissioner of Police [2010] NSWIR Comm 149

In this case the perpetrator engaged in behaviour far from becoming.

> The applicant ... exposed his penis to which a bottle opener was attached by means of a ring (which was attached to the bottle opener) inserted into a piercing in his penis known as a 'Prince Albert' piercing. That behaviour was described by the applicant as a 'party trick', although on the evening in question, the applicant added to his misbehaviour the use of the opener to open a bottle of beer. The conduct, so described, shall be referred to generally as 'the impugned conduct'.

It would appear to be a hostile environment where colleagues use their penis to open drinks. It seems fair to suggest that the so called ‘impugned conduct’ would have left people feeling embarrassed, stressed and uncomfortable. So much so that formal complaints were made and court proceedings were implemented. However this public servant’s party trick should not have been able to be repeated in a public service organisation with a code of behaviour and policies of equity and valuing diversity. Maybe because there was no mention in any policies of Prince Alberts the ‘impugned conduct’ was tolerated.

Mr Lawrance applied to the Commissioner of Police for leave to appeal and accept re-employment as a police officer to a lower grade - Officer removed pursuant to s 181D of the Police Act 1990 on ground of officer's conduct - Officer exposed penis to group

of fellow officers. The Tribunal decided to grant leave to appeal however the appeal was dismissed [Lawrance v Commissioner of Police [2010] NSWIRComm 149].

## Raymond Sewell V NSW Police Force [2008]

Raymond Sewell V NSW Police Force [2008] is the story of an 'a..e grabber'. Not only did he 'grab the a...s' of colleagues but he went to other government departments and 'grabbed the a...s' of other public servants.

This public servant not only behaved inappropriately with colleagues by touching them but also displayed his 'flair' to other government departments where he told these workers that perfume smelled better on breasts and he would like to smell it. He also suggested he would go to their place at 3am. But through it all the inappropriate behaviour was denied.

> The investigation found that you made inappropriate comments to Ms McDermott at the Commercial Hotel while you were off duty. Again, while you were on duty and at the Probation and Parole Office Coonamble in an official capacity you made inappropriate comments to both Ms McDermott and Ms Callaghan. As a result the investigation made sustained findings against you in relation to these incidents.
>
> Although you denied that you told jokes of a sexual nature while on official duties at the Probation and Parole Office Coonamble, the employees of the office all provided corroborating evidence that you did so. As such the investigation found that you were untruthful in answers to questions regarding the inappropriate jokes you told to the female staff at the Probation and Parole Office Coonamble.

Seeing this officer had the confidence to take his inappropriate behaviour outside his own public service unit demonstrates that a culture of 'more than just bad behaviour'

was tolerated. Really what is so wrong with telling a few blue jokes or touching someone. It was the outside agency that progressed the matter to the Tribunal.

Despite his appeal to be reinstated the summons was dismissed with costs.

## Apps v Roads and Traffic Authority of New Wales [2007].

In this case we see unfold a story of stalking and inappropriate sexual behaviour.

A male officer became fixated on a female officer. He would touch her. Give her flowers and condoms. Send her sexually explicit emails and pictures of nude people. The behaviour was so tolerated that other members of the team would touch the woman in the same way as the perpetrator as a joke. Despite the lack of maliciousness in this behaviour from co-workers it still conveys the message that it is acceptable to touch colleagues at work. There are strict email guidelines that prohibit the sending of explicit or offensive emails. However this 'strictness' is not really adhered to in this government department. However in Sharon's case, her perpetrator eventually was sacked over the sending of pornographic and sexually explicit emails. He was not sacked for touching women's breasts or for receiving fellatio at work. It would appear each public service unit has behaviour that will not be tolerated while the related behaviour may be condoned in other units.

In *Apps V Roads and Traffic Authority (2007)* the perpetrator would drive past the victim's house, visit her in hospital when she was at her most vulnerable and give unwelcome gifts. It is hard to avoid a stalker if you work with them.

The language used to report these behaviours dampen their outrageousness, hiding the effect this behaviour has on the victim.

> I started to feel scared and intimidated and unable to handle the unwanted attention from him anymore...

The trigger incident that ignited the claim was the perpetrators repeated inquiries into her private life in the public arena.

> Did you find a new r..t at the wedding?
>
> Who have you been r..ting?
>
> Did you r..t him?

This was said in the office. Witnessed and heard by colleagues. Testified to in court. The inference being that this woman was sexually promiscuous so should not be offended by the advances of the perpetrator. In fact she probably instigated it. This is not a new story but in a public service unit people should have the expectation that their workplace will be safe from stalking behaviour and if this happens it would be managed quickly and efficiently. As in *Kim Hunt v RailCorp (2007)* a counter claim was made in this case against the woman for photocopying a foreign order. The court found there was no colour printer at the office and the complaint was malicious. This public servant's life was made hell. Not by her own doing but through the unwelcome attention of a colleague. Her story fits well with my participants and demonstrates the frequency or universality of 'more than just bad behaviour' in the public service. It is an organisational issue when public servants cannot undertake their work without being touched or harassed.

Despite appealing his dismissal the Tribunal found Mr App's dismissal was fair in the circumstances and his application for reinstatement was dismissed (Apps v. Roads and Traffic Authority of New South Wales [2007] NSWIR Comm 1025).

It could be argued that these examples only highlight a few bad apples. However it was a dysfunctional public service that allowed the perpetrators to engage in these behaviours. In all three cases above the perpetrators denied the sexual harassment or did not see their behaviour as outrageous. Even in the face of multiple women complaining, the accusations were still denied. Other people witnessed the behaviour but let it continue. These are organisational issues that must be addressed both at the macro and micro levels.

Importantly these behaviours are happening in a context of anti-discrimination legislation, EEO policies, Valuing Diversity guidelines and anti-bullying procedures.

On the Anti-Discrimination Board website there are hundreds of cases of extremely bad behaviour as demonstrated within this study. And not all cases of 'more than just bad behaviour' are progressed to the Anti-Discrimination board. Any case of sexual harassment, workplace violence or extreme hostility is unacceptable in the modern workplace. But as the participants and the cases demonstrate 'more than just bad behaviour' still exists in 2011.

When we have police showing their Prince Alberts, when we have drunk and drugged police touching colleagues' a...s and when we have personnel stalking and asking about the "r..ting of colleagues" it paints a dim and bleak picture of the public service. A picture reinforced through my participants' stories.

It suggests that in the public service there are places where inappropriate and appalling behaviour is allowed to percolate and overflow and burn and blister those in its toxic path. After reading these cases it is hard to be optimistic about the future of the public service. Does the public service bring out the worse in people or is it just a few bad apples? People should not behave in this fashion at work, not paid for by tax dollars. There should be minimum standards. One of the issues is the public service should not foster an environment where these behaviours can happen. That everyone including colleagues, supervisors and managers do not tolerate 'more than just bad behaviour'. People need to speak up. However seeing these incidents keep occurring it would appear that the culture of the public service allows the behaviours to begin and continue. On reflection I am not optimistic for those working in the public service or for those who need the support the public service is obliged to provide.

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