

Women in Research Ireland
26 Feb 2021
Zoom recording
Webinar: Toxicity in the Workplace. A discussion
Transcript from live captioning (courtesy of PCR.ie)

.

>>: Everyone as you are signing in, if
you can type in the chat where you are located,
that would be great for us to keep an idea of
where everyone is joining us from.

Oh Toronto! Somebody in Canada.

>>: Let's get started. For new attendees
joining, if you could type in the chat, let us
know where you are from. Welcome everyone,
I am Susan, co director and founding member
of Women in Research Ireland and welcome today
to our first event of a four part mental health
workshop series in 2021 which is sponsored by
the Royal Society of Chemistry Inclusion and
Diversity. Today's event is titled toxicity in
the workplace. We will define what is a toxic
work environment but to start we will ask that
you take part in this anonymous poll. This is
anonymous, so you can either answer "yes" or
"no" or I am not sure. We will leave this open
for a little bit, people that are joining us
and then I will show the results. I will close
it in five, four, three, two, one. Okay, let's
see. So showing the results, it seems that the

majority of people believe they work in a toxic environment, so this hopefully be with a helpful session for you. For those who are not sure, we will help you figure things out.

Now let's jump into the conversation.

Keep in mind that we will be taking questions from the audience at the end of this event, so during this event, type your questions into the Q&A and we will go through those at the end.

Also, there is live captioning, so if you go into your Zoom menu options and select subtitles, you will be able to see the live captioning that's going on during this event.

Today we have two panelists that will help guide us to better understand unpleasant work experience, unpleasant work experiences and arm us with tools to empower us. So first we welcome Abiola Muhammad Ogunfowra. She a founding member of racism on the couch, a space to discuss the realities of racism within the psychological field. Next we have Professor Apryl Stalcup, from the chemical sciences department at Dublin city university. She recent by was awarded the Dal Nogare prize for her contribution to chromatography which is separation chemistry. Thank you both for taking the time to participate in this

important conversation. Let's get started with brief introductions from each panelist, let's start with Abiola please introduce yourself and then we will hear from Apryll and move on to the discussion.

>>: Sorry, I was finding it difficult to unmute myself. My name is Abiola. Like Susan mentioned, I am a counselling psychologist, I work with people in my private practice. I see people for various reasons and one of them unfortunately that I see people for is the impact of just being in a toxic environment on their mental health. And I can talk about this further on later on in the talk, but that's a bit about me.

>>: Apryll?

>>: Yes, I am Apryl Stalcup, I started out my career, I have been teaching 30 years, my first academic position, I was the first woman in my department in 40 years, and in my second institution, I was the first woman in almost 200 years to make it to full Professor. And it wasn't because I was particularly brilliant or that I was the first woman that they had hired. There had been other women in the department before me, but they had either been marginalised or driven off. As a single

mom, I needed that job, I couldn't afford to be driven off.

>>: Thanks. Very relevant to all of this for both of you. Let's move on to our first question, how do you define a toxic work environment? I want to hear both of your opinions on this, but first we will start with Abiola?

>>: I suppose for me, a toxic work environment impacts on two levels: the first being that it impacts your professional work. You feel like you are not able to, I suppose -- or not even able to, you are not allowed to be and perform to the best of your abilities but when you can really start to know that it's toxic is that it's not just ending in the workplace for you, it's affecting your personal life, and you are seeing more of it whenever you get home, you are seeing aspects of it and how it impacts you and your relationship with others. So on the one hand, a toxic work environment may start at work but it transfers and becomes part of your day, your relationship with others, so yeah, it's both. It's on that level of first the professional aspect, but then more importantly the personal aspect.

>>: Apryll?

>>: Yeah, the toxic -- I kind of think of toxic environment on a couple of different levels but different than the personal that Abiola was talking about. And that is from the standpoint of human resources. If you are not in a comfortable environment, you are not performing at your best, but the organisation is probably not performing at its best either. And there is the possibility that people are driven away. One of my colleagues used to say, used to ask me why I would be so supportive of him in trying to get tenure and I said because you are an organic chemist and I hate organic chemistry and if we lose you, we have to go through a whole bump of more interviews and I have got to go sit through a whole bunch of organic seminars I don't want to sit through, so I just as soon hang on to you.

>>: Thanks. Okay so, let's move on to the next question, because most of us begin a new position with optimism, and for the relationships and for the operative results. What are the warning signs of a toxic workplace.

>>: I suppose there is so many right in terms of maybe if you start off you are feeling

discriminated and discouraged and not being appreciated for your hard work. There is the inclusion aspect, maybe you are being excluded by the team, not being invited into things. You are asked to complete tasks that are just impossible. And you are not being provided with the necessary or the right resources for it. It could even go as far as where you start getting -- it's not necessarily aggressive, but it's starting to have tones of aggression from like your emails and chats. Especially like now where many of us are working from home, our work is in our home space as well. So there is that element of it just, if you remember the definition earlier on where it starts to trickle into your personal space. Even if the whole system in the organisation is more competition based, so it's more about how much you can provide and how quickly you can provide it more so than value of the importance of relationship and trust between co workers, and none of that exists. Then I think those could be classified as the red flag signals of you possibly being in a toxic work environment. But I think with things like this, it all boils down to something like the core in you, where you ask yourself where are you in this

space and do you feel like you are being valued? Do you feel like your contributions are important? Do you even look forward to being in that space? How do you feel as soon as you leave that space?

>>: Apryll?

>>: I think one of the biggest red flags for me in determining whether there is a toxic environment or not is how well the information flows within the organisation. If you have got people who see Western information, it's called information asymmetry. ^ and if you are being asked to make decisions or asked to do stuff that you weren't involved in the decision-making process, that is a red flag. Now we do have to be careful. We all come from different backgrounds and everything, I think probably one of the most valuable experiences I had when I was an undergraduate I worked at a junkyard, an auto junkyard for a couple of years. And it was a yard -- it was the largest in the state of California, the third largest in the United States. We used to get 1400 phone calls a day and this was in the day before they had the automatic deciding where you wanted your call to go. That was all answered by one person, okay and when you are

answering the phone 1400 times in a day, you can't have a conversation with anybody over any length of time. And so I sat in this little glass cubicle and watched the body language. What I would see is that the guys that were the most -- that had the most turnover which were the parts pullers, they would do stink to each other when a new guy got hired. They'd do things like pour oil in the new guy's toolbox until they got sorted out the pecking order and then once they got that sorted out, everything was okay. So as women going into a male dominated field sometimes, we have to be careful that we don't take offence unnecessarily. My first job, I was the other -- the other academics were doing stink to me, but they were also doing it to the guy I got hired with. The issues were different. They picked gender with me because they thought it might be a hot button issue with him. They picked space with him because it was a hot button issue to him. That was just how they evaluated a new person. It was will you step up, or will you fold, are you somebody that can be relied upon if there is a conflict in the organisation? I guess that's all I have to say.

>>: No it's good, Apryll we will start with you for the next as a follow-up. Even if we are aware of an unhealthy working environment, some of us must remain due to financial or career obligations, how do we deal with the shame and self criticism that can be associated with staying in a known toxic work environment?

>>: This came up in a conversation we had I think yesterday or the day before and I was wondering, because I think -- so I wrote this article surviving a toxic workplace which you made available to the participants in this thing and at the time this stuff was going on, at first I didn't understand what was going on, but I never felt shame about it. And I think because I didn't think of myself as a victim, I thought of myself as a target and there is a big difference between those two things. By thinking of myself as a target, the way I kind of frame it is that when you recognise a toxic environment, you give people the opportunity to change the error of their ways, and if they don't, then you leave, because you are staying in that kind of situation as a victim. It just keeps putting them in a position where they can continue to make bad choices towards you.

That's the way I framed it for me. Okay, and then but -- also the other thing is sunshine. Sunshine is always your best friend when somebody's picking on you, or when they're not keeping promises to you, that you draft something like a memo and say this is what I understand this conversation was all about, and you make it very professional, not emotional, and you distribute it, CC it to other people in the organisation that should have some information about this. I have done -- I have used that a couple of times to get people to back down.

>>: So take the power back on yourself?

>>: Take the power back on yourself, yes.

And then one other thing is to keep a diary. I was listening to a programme about the height of the cold war and part of what brought down the Soviet Union was that people documented extensively the abuses that were going on, dates, names, all that kind of stuff, and having that kind of a record can be very powerful at some point, both for yourself, but also in case there is ever an opportunity to move forward on that.

>>: Abiola?

>>: Whenever I saw the question, I

thought of it differently in terms of I went into more the concept of shame in itself and where shame comes from. Shame generally is where you are thinking there is something bad about you, or you are somehow held inadequate or you have done something, so it's the internalised version of it. When we think about shame in the context of a toxic work environment, and the reality of it in a toxic work environment, the shame that is supposed to be in that space isn't there. So the environment is not working. It is bad. It's inadequate. Whereas like when we are unable to meet the demands of that space, then we make it something about ourselves, so we think somehow I am not doing enough, I am not good enough, whereas that shame actually originally belongs to the toxic work environment.

Whenever you are able to separate that for yourself that you can see that the other two sometimes two components with shame is the internalised version and kind of like the other aspect that Apryll was talking about, where you put it back to the environment and you see that it's not really about me. So I really love the fact that Apryll was saying like documented, create a record, know it for yourself, even if

you create like an email thread around what's going on so there is proof, there is that part of you where you are like actually when I put this down on paper, there is actually something wrong with the system.

>>: Then dealing, putting, taking shame off of yourself and seeing yourself as a target and not a victim, that leads us into our next question about what are the largest systems that are in place that reinforce this toxic workplace? Apryll?

>>: I think one of the big mangledings at institutions like universities -- misunderstandings at institutions like universities is the human resources department. It sounds like it ought to be about the humans, but that's not its job, its job is to protect the institution. And so it's not necessarily the right thing to do is to go to HR. You would think that would be the way to go. You might be better off going -- if it's maybe something like a women's studies department or something like that, if they have that on your campus, or counselling like Abiola's involved in, that might be a better place to go. But we need to -- I didn't realise that until just recently that that's what HR's role is to

protect to institution.

>>: Unfortunately sometimes you learn

that the hard way by going to them.

>>: And it's just literally building in

that, even if we transfer away from the

systems a little bit, our environment and what

we have been told is like in general we live in

a win or a lose type situation, so someone has

to be winning and someone has to be losing. So

even when we think about that back into the

system, the system always wants to remain in

the winning position, and sometimes at the

detriment of the people within that system.

There is a book written by Richard Hill on

how it's actually the society and the world

that is driving us crazy, and it's not from us.

And he talks a lot about how the system uses

shame as an element of control and how it keeps

us in that space. Because if we are so focused

on the things that we are not doing and how we

are not adequate enough in those spaces, then

we are not able to actually pause and reflect

on actually hold on one second, it's the system

that's at fault, it's the system that's not

working.

I really like this book because it

actually gives really practical tools on how to

break it down for yourself in terms of where you boil it down back to who you are at the core, and how you make sense of, and how you separate yourself from that system. So yeah.

>>: What's the name of the book, you said Richard Hill.

>>: I will put it into the group chat disbelieves going to say yeah, I was going to type it in just for everyone to have at the event. Then the follow-up from that what can be done to overturn the systemic flaws such as being careful who you talk to or even just this idea if it is such a toxic environment, your closest colleagues are not necessarily the best people to go to, they're not on your side. So what can be done to work -- to help not have the systemic flaws be a problem.

>>: I think there is several layers to that, say for example earlier on when we were talking about the reason why sometimes we have to stay in the systems, it's like for really basic and really important reasons in terms of I need to put a roof over my head, I need to pay my bills. And when you frame that in the sense of I am doing this or I am staying here just until I can, and it's kind of like saying that you are reinforcing that the reason why

you are staying in this system for this limited amount of time is not something to do with you, or it's not something to do with whether or not you are not good enough or you don't think you don't deserve enough, it's just what's currently available to you.

So I think one of the first ways to take part of the system is naming it for yourself, the reason why you are staying there, and then start incorporating things like kindness, compassion, looking after yourself within that system until you are able to feel a lot more resourced and a lot more powerful or at least empowered to leave the system. And especially with toxic environments, it's -- even sometimes boiling down to every day I am going to do something small that will make it easier for me to leave this space as soon as possible. That could be like enrolling in courses, expanding your -- expanding your skills just so you feel like okay I am doing this, staying here because of these practical reasons but I have taken the necessary steps and things in motion for me to be able to exist in this environment.

>>: Apryll?

>>: I think that's really good advice and looking back on my experiences, so I grew up on

military bases and there is a couple of consequences of that that's unique, and one of them is that there aren't real good role models for compromise in that kind of an environment.

The second thing is that you move so much that you never learn -- you don't really often learn the skills of compromise that you need to maintain long-term relationships and so one of the things I had to do in a job that was really toxic, was I had to be conscious of the fact that there is this issue came up, and is this something that I want to go to the mat for, is this a battle that I want to fight? Or is it something that I can let go? And when I knew that that distinction, I could let some of these things go, pick your battles. But there are other times, no I am sorry this crosses the line for me and I am going to go there.

The second thing about it, like Abiola was saying about identifying the reasons, I wanted to leave for a long time, for probably six to seven years, but it was at a critical point in my son's growing up, and having gone to eight different schools growing up, I knew how challenging it was particularly when they got into junior high and high school. So I was committed to going beyond that point or staying

because of that and that was the reason I was staying. There was something else you said earlier too about the shame, how institutions try to use shame. I remember after sending out one of these emails that embarrassed one of my colleagues that my chairman who was part of this toxic mix said something to me about how this colleague of mine was very embarrassed about what I had done by sending out this email. And I said well nobody seemed to worry about my feelings when all this conversation was going on behind my back. And that kind of -- okay, yeah, I am not owning that shame.

>>: Yeah, you put it back on them really.

>>: Yeah.

>>: Yeah, you have to hold up the mirror, and also Apryll, you brought up a good point about having a community, people outside of work, for you it was your son, so you had motivation and that you had a support system, so it's also important that people have friends and families outside of their work space in order to have an understanding and to have people that are compassionate and can help you deal with the struggles, that you have to stay for now for whatever the obligations are, but then eventually you can break out of it. Also

while you are there being.

be empowered to help show a mirror and show some people that it's not the best way to be doing things.

>>: Just one more thing to jump in here, and that is that you have to -- toxicity does not happen in a vacuum.

>>: Yeah.

>>: Okay, you have to look at the bigger organisation to see where -- what else is in the organisation that might -- so for instance, I was at another institution and when I first moved to town, one of the things I found out about that institution was as late as the 1970s, they were exposing terminally ill children and minorities to lethal doses of radiation in defence contracts to support contracts in defence. And I was -- that's pretty toxic, I can't imagine much more toxic than that. So that told me something about the institution that I was a part of.

>>: And you had already been there.

>>: I found out about that just as I got there, and so that was always in the back of my mind to say okay there is something wrong here fundamentally with this institution, there is a mark on the sole if you will -- on thees

soul, if you will as an institution. ^

whenever I saw toxicity, I looked at not just where it was locally but did it extend out into the broader organisation and it did.

>>: Right those red flags that you keep in the back of your mind, to keep the checklists. Abiola.

>>: I was just going to add to that in I think part of what makes the whole conversation around whether an environment is toxic is sometimes people might identify someone as being toxic or one person as being toxic, whereas like it's the whole system, the fact that someone can be toxic within that system tells you a lot about their environment and how the environment hasn't put the necessary safeguarding in place to stop that sort of behaviour.

>>: Yeah, that's the way -- you have to just be mindful -- it's hard because you are doing the work for yourself, and it's like you have to be doing extra work to keep conscious of what's going on around you. You have to be a secret agent or a spy going around trying to figure everything out! But also any conversation that we are going to have about toxic work spaces, we should include bullying.

Sometimes bullying can be subtle, and when it's subtle lots of times it can be excused. Aside from blatant misuse and blatant bullying, what are some other characteristics of bullying.

Abiola.

>>: Especially in workplaces, the two most common ones would be social bullying as well as psychological bullying. So say with social bullying, it would be like being left out on purpose. Maybe you make a request and you are being ignored. You are having people spread rumours that aren't true about you. And then when it comes to the psychological one, sometimes that can be a lot more difficult to identify, but it's not that it's difficult to identify, you feel it in your body, but it's harder to name. Because it could be like someone having very unpredictable reactions to say the delivery of your work, some days you might come in and they might be really ecstatic about it and the next day you might present the exact same work and you never know what to expect from that type of person. Or it could be intimidation, but it's the unspoken one, where it's very difficult for you to say it did happen or this is how it happened, or it could be something as minute as getting dirty looks.

It's hard to put that down on email, or to say to someone, because then you start to look petty, or you are trying to be difficult, but all of that in itself actually causes such strong reactions in your body, it makes you feel unsafe in that environment. And that's part of what makes it bullying.

Again I felt like it wouldn't be fair for us to talk about bullying without even bringing it into more of the work from home sort of environment that we are all in. A lot of researchers were really surprised to find that actually just because you are working from home didn't mean that the sort of bullying that was happening in work spaces disappeared. If anything it probably heightened in that they have the extra layer, or extra removal of not seeing you face-to-face, so they can do it more through emails, through making unnecessary demands, even something as far as knowing that this is the time limit that you have, and you purposely try to break that. So it's unfortunate, but it does happen in a lot of this sort of environment.

>>: Apryll?

>>: Yeah, the -- the idea of bullying, if you are not sure at first that it is bullying,

sometimes what some people recommend is that you invite the person maybe to coffee or something like that or tea in a place that's not -- that's away from your space or that person's space, and just say have I done something to offend you, is there something ... but I tried doing that with one of the people and what turned out was that it became more covert, and that's when I knew, yeah this is bullying.

I don't know if you planned on asking us about mobbing, but that's another aspect of this that once I came across that term.

Sometimes in an organisation, a colleague can be suddenly identified as a bad neighbour to everybody else, and everybody's picking on this one person, and it's not -- if that person -- if you are the person that everybody's picking on, individual acts can sound like that's trivial, why are you being so sensitive or so touchy? But they don't understand that sometimes it's a cumulative effect and I have seen that happen to people, it's not always a gender thing, sometimes it -- I am very sensitive to the fact that sometimes it's old people, people want to drive out the old person because they think that they'll free uproarses.

And sometimes us old people have some ideas about how to beat back some of this stuff okay. Sometimes it can be gender, it can also be cultural background. It doesn't matter, but once an organisation gets into that kind of a mobbing, where they all pick on one person, they can -- that can dissipate after they drive the person away, but then they'll come back again and they'll decide somebody else is a target, and so it's -- if you know that that's a thing that has been identified in organisations, it's -- to me, I knew what that was the minute I read about it.

>>: No, it's important to bring that up, yeah, Abiola.

>>: I was just going to add on to that in such a toxic environment, it's the idea of finding someone to put the blame on, to put the shame on, someone to take the responsibility. Unfortunately of the toxic environment instead of ^ looking at it from the wider picture and it's a system that's just not working.

>>: Yeah, exactly.

>>: In some of the -- one of the studies that I read about, they said that organisations that are most likely to engage in mobbing are religious organisations, governments and

academia. Those are the organisations that are most likely to engage in this kind of toxic behaviour.

>>: And institutional element in them, right?

>>: I think part of it is because if -- in a company presumably this kind of toxicity mobbing, driving people off, is going to undermine the profit of the -- the profitability of the organisation, whereas in religion, religious organisations, academia and government, it's not profit driven and so therefore it can be -- it can persist -- I suspect that that's the reason why it can persist there.

>>: Yeah the lack of accountability that can happen. Then following up, someone who feels powerless again, feeling like the victim, how can they combat this bullying? I know Apryll you mentioned calling people out and stuff. Abiola?

>>: I think even as far as -- so like investigate the system, so in terms of what policy is around this form of bullying, and what policy, does your company have something to begin with? Do they have a way of naming it, a process in that? Then you are

identifying the bigger problem, probably the problem that's keeping it in place. And then a lot of what April said is being able to name it, take a detailed record, take the necessary steps, and I think even adding the fact that it's important the type of story you tell yourself around it. So knowing that like you are the one being targeted, and it's not something to do with you, it's not something that you have done, or maybe that you haven't done enough. It's more that the system is just inadequate. So being very conscious of that and how you talk to yourself around it, and look after yourself within that sort of system.

>>: It may also be useful to go to somebody like Abiola okay. I know when I was dealing with a personal challenge years ago that was very emotional to me, that going to a counsellor who was able to help me rehearse the discussions that I wanted to have with the person as well as being able to calibrate. We all have insecurities and stuff and we can't always identify that what this person did or said to us was actually bullying. And so having somebody that you can bounce this off, not necessarily -- it may not necessarily be somebody in your personal life that's best able

to do this for you, because if they care about you, they want to see you not be in pain. But if they can't do anything about the pain, they'll probably just as soon not hear about it. We all got our own troubles. But if you can talk to somebody, it can be helpful to do that.

>>: Finding an outside resource to get an objective point of view. Sometimes we can all be thinking that we are making this up, or making a big deal out of it, or when we -- that we are just being weak and thatter not pushing ourselves enough. Also lots of times specifically bullying, that's what we can be told.

>>: Yeah.

>>: And it is the sort of thing, especially researchers, scientists, we are logical, but you do start to break down after a while, and you do start to question things when you have been hearing them too many times, day after day, week after week for a long period.

>>: It's very easy to get into that cycle of invaliditiing your experience.

>>: Probably in general it's good advice to talk to a therapist or seek counselling just to hear an objective opinion and also see how

this is possibly feeding into your personal life and if it is becoming detrimental and if it's unhealthy and just start to build that empowerment to try to understand how to show a mirror, or to keep the best notes and all that.

>>: Yeah.

>>: One day, so people in the audience, if they just all of a sudden wake up and realise they are working in a toxic environment, but again unable to leave due to the obligations, what can be done to alleviate the stress that you feel and the toll that it can take on your mental health, to get you through, knowing that you are going to leave but as Apryll said, it can take years because of things that are going on, lots of us can understand, or have experienced ourselves. So Abiola, what are some tools and then I will pitch to Apryll.

>>: I suppose that even having a clear wind down period. So you need to demar candidate, like this is work, and as ^ soon as I have left work, I am going to have a clear wind down period and this could range from going for a walk or working out or involving yourself in an activity that you can enjoy that kind of rejuvenates you. And it marks the end

of the work period and it's kind of like negotiating that boundary for you where you are very clear that as soon as it's this time, it doesn't matter what comes in, I am not going to check my emails, I am not going to respond to work calls, this is my own time. And it's just -- because you are trying to create pockets of space where you can breathe, where you can almost feel yourself again, because I imagine if you are in a toxic work environment that you are just trying to get through the seconds really, trying to get through that day. So you want to get to a place where you are like okay, the day's over, now I finally have time to do so and so. So that way it kind of does two things and you are taking time for yourself and it also gives you time to connect to the people in your life that you might feel like maybe they're getting the brunt of you being stuck in this place. You can connect with them in a more meaningful way. Which helps you as well in terms of you are still getting the relationship and the support that you need from them.

>>: I never thought of that creating a gap, because I know from my experiences, that sometimes it can be so exhausting that I would

love to go take a yoga class to sweat it off
and cleanse, but you just can't. So what you
said, even just going and sitting on a park
bench or if it's a rainy day, going in a café,
or sitting out even at home, if you have a sun
room or something, just a space -- a place to
create that space. And a key thing you
mentioned about not answering your emails, I
think one thing is put down the phone, not just
emails, but apps and ringing and all of that.
I think that can just help because it's
critical to keep the relationship with those
around you, but most critical is keeping the
relationship to yourself and perhaps that's
where taking that space, if you have the energy
for a yoga class or a jog that's great but I
know I have had times where sitting on a bench
and soaking in some sun, some 5 pm sun was
about all the strength I had to kind of
regenerate to build up my power to feel how to
keep going on and create a plan to change this
lifestyle S Apryll?

>>: Yeah, in terms of the yoga and stuff,
after being humbled at work, why do I need
another humbling experience after work when I
find my body doesn't work the way I want it
to!! ! One of the other things that I used to

do is I used to take my knitting with me to staff meetings. And I would sit there and knit because I found staff meetings incredibly stressful. And so just sitting there knitting, I am listening, I am paying attention, but yeah, that was a truly liberated woman does whatever the hell she feels like!

>>: I was going to say, you are bringing up a good point they had learned years ago, active versus passive hobbies and past times. For example, watching TV and binge watching, that's more passive, that can sometimes even make you feel less energetic and bring on depression, but doing something active which is reading or as you are saying stitching, I like to do cross stitching, or, yeah, you know, making a wool scarf, something active like that helps to calm you down and keeps your brain active, but it also is making you feel less passive because you are doing something actually active that keeps you going. Abiola? Were you going to say something.

>>: No!

>>: So now I was going to go through some resources, I see we have a few questions from the audience which is fabulous, but one thing I was going to talk about, we talked about yoga

or taking a breath, nervous system regulation.

I saw one person ask in the questions that was going to be part of this conversation, so I will throw it in now, did Abiola or Apryll ever use meditation if they were in a toxic environment? What were their thoughts on meditation. Abiola?

>>: I personally find kind of grounding myself using my breath as something very useful so, taking deep breaths, just checking in with my body, and sometimes I am very even aware that there is nothing that I can do or shift to make myself feel differently, but it's just acknowledging that that's where I am at. In terms of that sort of meditation, that sort of checking in with yourself in those environments, I think it's helpful in that you are at least naming, acknowledging that these feelings are coming up for yourself without actually trying to change anything.

I think when I think people might find meditation a little bit difficult is when they're doing different forms of meditation in the hope that it changes the system or it changes something for them in the system. The likelihood of that happening is very little.

>>: Apryll?

>>: Well, I thought -- I didn't read

that as meditation, I read it as mediation,

which is --

>>: And you are right! So we are getting

two for one here, I made --

-- (overspeaking) --

>>: The mediation, I have been involved

in mediation in a personal matter, but not in a

professional matter. Although I did consider

it when -- in one particular role, I did

consider doing a mediation, because -- and I

don't know, I think that can be very effective

if you are talking about two people who are

just having trouble talking to each other, but

if you truly do have a toxic person, I am not

sure it's going to be very helpful. It just

allows some box ticking to occur to say well we

did try this, and it may not -- I am not sure

how effective it is there, I would be open to

seeing if it was effective or not.

>>: Abiola, do you mind addressing the

mediation question?

>>: In terms of mediation, kind of very

similar to what Apryll was saying and the one

thing I will add further is that like in toxic

environments, it's probably really unsafe to do

that form of mediation because there is no

safety around how you share, how you can share, what will be done with what you share. So what may end up happening is you have shared how this is impacting you with nothing being done and even in some cases you are being blamed or shamed for having those experiences.

Mediation in terms of having a good party that that keep that sort of safety, the boundaries, then yes. But the chances of that happening is also very slim. So I think maybe the main thing is prioritising your safety and if actually this mediation will be able to take and acknowledge what is coming up for you against the system if necessary.

>>: Okay and now the idea was to go through some resources, we do have a bunch of questions, that's what I want to get to, but we have already gone through some resources so what we were going to talk about the boundaries of space, and then also Apryll you have given some good points how you speak up and document everything. I talked about meditation and breath work and then which led to mediation. I believe it we are going to throw it to Joanne and they're going to start asking the questions from the audience.

>>: Thank you all. The topics are really

resonating with a lot of us. The first question I have here, some of them anonymous attendee, I spent about three years working in a toxic environment, now one year since I left and I am in a very new and positive environment but I feel that my confidence was so damaged that I have anxiety and paranoia in my new situation that undermines my ability to be a good colleague and do a good job. How can I move past the toxic environment in my past?

>>: I had a Post Graduate who worked in a really extraordinarily toxic research group and after she left that group and came to work in my group, to some extent it was like dealing with a severely abused child, because she was a bit twitchy, she was always expecting for me to be gosh come down on her hard. ^ the only thing I could do was say of course you can take Easter off, you have got three adorable daughters. It helped for her, I knew who she worked for, okay, but you might have to scope it out a little bit with who you are working with, to just explain that to them. Explain that to them that you are trying -- that you really like working in this place and sometimes you may be a bit twitchy because of this past experience that you had.

>>: And even also recognising that it's important that you allow yourself to even process some of those emotions coming up in that. Like what I am hearing from that question was that when she is getting a normal reaction, she is almost shocked, surprised, relief. But then also that part of her is waiting for the other shoe to drop. And which is normal if that's the experience you have had in your previous work environment. So giving yourself the time and the process to heal, so that might be reaching out to say even a psychologist or talking to friends or family about what's going on for you and very importantly, letting people in work, if you feel safe and comfortable that you can have that relationship with them, let them know this is why it may be taking me longer to open up or feel comfortable or respond back. But even just allowing yourself know that it was an environment that impacted you and it's normal and expected that you are having this experience.

>>: One other thing I would like to add to that is that it's also important for those of us -- for us all to recognise this in each other. That to cut each other some slack. I

had a colleague I worked with in this place that there had been one of the women that were marginalised that came before me in this institution and I had said something at a meeting and she came down on my office and absolutely exploded at me. Wondering what I was saying and what I was doing and I had to just accept that from her previous experiences and reassure her we have to cut each other -- give each other that space. ^.

>>: Thank you Abiola and Apryll. I have a question from one of our attendees, Ellen O'Shea, is intersectionality a major factor in toxicity in the workplace when somebody is othered by more than one characteristic.

>>: 100 per cent in terms of it gives something to target, it gives something to name and shame. It provides the system with a weapon. So yeah.

>>: The literature on mobbing says that the people who are most likely to be targeted are people who somewhat -- who are somewhat accomplished but don't quite fit the organisational norms. And so when we bring diversity into the workplace, that we may be setting people up for failure if we don't take this into account.

>>: Thank you both.

>>: We have another question from Louise who says in my own workplace, the toxicity is developed slowly and as such I have had to put up boundaries in socialising with others in an attempt to protect my own well-being. However what advice do you have around putting up these boundaries as I think this can often make things worse.

>>: Very rightly so. When people are negotiating their boundaries, they usually are met with very strong reactions from people who they are creating their boundary from because the reason why you have to create that boundary to begin with is they were almost crossing into your boundaries, doing what they wished within your boundaries and that's why you are going into that space of hey, this is a line that I need to draw, this is something that's important for me and this is a way that I need to be able to work. And someone who is used to supposedly crossing into other people's boundaries, they're not going to find this or be very receptive to this. I think the main advice that I would give in terms of that is expect that reaction, that reaction is part of the conflict that is needed with you

negotiating the boundaries. Resource yourself.

Be able to say actually no, this is something that I need, I know it's important for myself and actually just stick behind that. Even if you are met with whatever reaction, be like I hear you, I can see how this might be difficult for you, but for me personally this is important and you don't feel the need to back off or back down from it.

>>: I guess the one thing I agree with all of that, but when you are dealing with a workplace bully, sometimes putting up these boundaries and stuff gives you - gets you out -- you don't get to put any input into the narrative that goes around instead and it can in those cases get worse. And so that is something to keep in mind, yes the boundaries are important, but you can't be totally behind the boundaries because then you lose input into the narrative.

>>: We have one more question from the audience, Yvonne says hi thank you for your insights, I wish I had understood the issue sooner. I have experience working at a university as research staff and I experienced bullying from teaching staff and had a terrible time trying to resolve the issue. Do you think

universities should keep records of complaints of bullying made by staff against other staff? I found it shocking that my university didn't keep any records of bullying complaints. By the way, I left the job shortly after because the issue wasn't resolved and I think it had to do with my role and my age as someone in my early 20s.

>>: I was going to pass that on to Apryll maybe.

>>: The thing with the university keeping a record, that drops it back into the HR realm, and they're not going to do that. They're just not going to do that, because their job is to protect the institution. In that case, so let me give an example. When I was in graduate school there was a faculty member grab female students inappropriately in labs. And the only way I found out that this was not just me, was I made discreet enquiries amongst the other graduate students. Usually this kind of stuff is serial. And I think that that's how this kind of stuff, if there is bullying that goes on -- I wish there was a better way to do it but you are just not going to be able to do it through HR. Maybe like I said before, counselling office, but there is

confidentiality issues there as well. So I really don't have a good answer for this one.

>>: Thank you, I have one more question from an attendee. How do we go about addressing the system as a whole and not making this an issue of an individual target or victim in organisations that are forced to have bullying policies and corporate communication that chastises such behaviour, yet such behaviour still happens. How do we go about addressing this at a level beyond individual, corporate organisation responsibility but at the level of society?

>>: That's a big question! That's a very big question. For me personally, I think there is so much -- a huge part of me is knowing that there is so much that I have control over in terms of there is so much -- I can't control other people's actions, I can only focus on what I do and how I look after myself within spaces, and I think maybe prioritising your safety and what is important within society and even more of us being able to say that this isn't okay for me means that there is a huge number of people saying collectively this isn't okay. So I think it probably starts off more in an individual level before we can even get

to a societal level.

>>: I think something can play out as we progress in our careers, to set the tone in the organisation. When I first came to Ireland, I was made director of the Irish separation science cluster, and I had a young woman working for me that I could see that there was a mobbing situation developing. And I just made it very clear this is not going to happen on my watch. It is not going to happen. I won't tolerate it. And that's the kind of thing we can do. When we are at the low rungs there is not much maybe we can do except survive. Okay. And maybe educate ourselves as much as possible on things that we can do. And as we move along in our careers, we set the tone, we -- we are very clear about what we will tolerate and won't tolerate. It's part of the reason I wrote that article on surviving the toxic workplace. Because I saw other people being mobbed, being bullied, some of it were things, ideas I got from my own experience growing up on military bases. Military parents are really hard on their kids, and so for instance if I knew I was going to be in trouble at home, I brought a stranger home with me, and I employed that strategy in the workplace to

keep people from doing it, participate in workshops like this where you can get ideas from other people, all of that's in the mix. I think the other thing is just making it very clear this is not something that will be tolerated.

>>: Yeah and also when you talk about the earlier -- we are wrapping up, but when you talk about you don't have power at the lower levels, you can at least unify voices, talk to other people in your under grad classes and Post Graduate classes to unify the voices because maybe then, you guys three are more powerful than one, five are more powerful than three. It can possibly build like that. I wanted to finish up the questions so we can wrap up on time and I wanted to end for the audience members that are left, I want to do one final poll asking about this, so I am launching the poll now. I will give it a few more seconds because the numbers are going up. And then we will wrap up by saying you thank you. I will close the poll in five, four, three, two, and one. And it says that -- it seems like a lot of people did learn something useful today, so that's been great that we were able to help people. But we need to wrap up

because of time, I would like to thank everybody, so Abiola and Apryll for their participation in the discussion, and this is being recorded so even for people who haven't attended, we will put it on our YouTube channel and I would like to thank fellow Women in Research Ireland committee members for helping with the questions, and also as far as resources, we will send some, there is some in the chat going on right now, but also we will send some in the follow-up email. Thanks everyone for attending and we hopefully will see you at our next event.

>>: Thanks for having us, thank you.

>>: Yeah, thanks for having us.