# FROM SURVIVAL TO SELF-CARE:
# PERFORMATIVE PROFESSIONALISM AND THE SELF IN THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

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**Abstract**

Universities' embracing of a neoliberal discourse in which education is seen as a commodity has generated profound wellbeing issues for staff members involved in teaching, including academic library staff. While library workers are generally perceived as service providers, many are involved in supporting students' critical and intellectual development and understanding of complex disciplinary practices. This teaching practice takes place in an unstable and silently contested territory, in which the systemic causes of fragmented identity may be only slowly recognised.

This chapter describes one former academic librarian's experiences over a decade of teaching in UK universities, and outlines the self-care strategies that sustained them through challenges to their identity and value as teacher, librarian, and afterwards as researcher. The chapter offers a provisionally positive ground in which to revisit and re-vision professional identities and work towards surfacing and challenging neoliberal narratives of work and adequacy for everyone involved in higher education.

**Keywords**

professionalism, resilience, vocational awe, library workers, social writing, meditation, depression, anxiety, selfhood

**Introduction**

Can you be a librarian without a library? I am.

Can you be a researcher without an institution? I am.

Can you be a teacher without any students? I am.

*I am other I now.*
But who?

<div align="center">*</div>

To burn out in two successive jobs, in different sectors of higher education, raises fundamental questions about the value and resilience of the self; perhaps even more so, about whether that self has any legitimate claim to a professional identity.

Training as a librarian after completing a PhD in literary philosophy, I found myself in a borderland between two epistemological paradigms with markedly contrasting practices, positionality, academic idiom, and truth grounds. Negotiating this change of domain from the humanities to the social sciences was both challenging and intellectually stimulating. However, in the course of my career as a teaching librarian, I encountered further slippages of territory and identity that were less positively disruptive, including conflicting expectations of academic and professional staff, and friction between the library's positioning as provider of materials and its potential for supporting learning.

As I developed as a teacher as well as librarian, and still more as I began to publish research, I found myself in a silently contested territory in which the perception of my 'place' as part of the service offering of the academic library conflicted with the values of critical pedagogy that had become central to my professional identity. However, through meditation and the mutual support of social writing groups, I managed to preserve a sense of self and a connection with my professional and pedagogic values.



Finding the courage to write and the self-compassion to meditate integrated my various professional selves. These hands that typed lesson plans, gesticulated in graphic reinforcement of teaching points, filled countless notebooks with passionate scholarly and pedagogic curiosity, found new expression in the stillness of meditation and the freedom to write authentically. Through these

practices, I found a means to re-ground both my personhood and my professional and pedagogic values in the face of systemic factors that threatened to undermine them all.

**The neoliberal university and the limits of the human**

In many parts of the world higher education has become underpinned by a market-driven vision of economic rationality (Shahjahan, 2015; Newman & Jahdi, 2009; Gill, 2017). With this new focus on "the product, place, price and promotion of education" (Newman & Jahdi, 2009, p. 9) has come a radical shift in university values and positioning from a culture that privileged critical thought to one that privileges the demands of the marketplace.

The neoliberalisation of higher education has generated profound issues for staff members involved in teaching. hooks famously enjoins us "to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students" (1994, p. 13), while Palmer argues that "good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher" (1998, p. 10) and therefore has "as much to do with our shadows and limits, our wounds and fears, as with our strength and potentials". In marked contrast to this liberatory, person-centred vision, Newman and Jahdi argue that higher education knowledge and skills have become "regarded as mere commodities to be accumulated by students, and to be sold as predetermined packages to those who can afford them" (2009, p. 9). A marketised vision of education frames knowledge as a product, information as a commodity, and teaching as a depersonalised act of conveyance. It is no coincidence that the term 'delivery' is in high usage currently in institutional teaching and learning narratives – a metaphor which closely echoes Freire's banking model, which depicts knowledge as a fund from which students are periodically granted deposits (1972, p. 58).

Furthermore, the switch to a corporate rather than an intellectual agenda has brought about an emphasis on measuring and quantifying outcomes (Hall & Bowles, 2016) which in turn has led to steeply increased scrutiny and assessment of those products - what Erickson, Hanna and Walker call "indicator fetishism" (2020, p. 4). Scholarly output is driven by "shame logics" (Shahjahan, 2019, p. [2]) through which academics are coerced to continue producing at the expense of actual teaching and research: "There is always a deadline, a clock, or something to do ... our bodies become 'mobile devices' for conducting this work" (Shahjahan, 2015, pp. 493-4).

In the United Kingdom the neoliberalisation of higher education has seen workloads rise to the point where they constitute "a structural political issue that is profoundly harmful to health" (Gill,

2017, p. 6). Hall and Bowles argue that UK higher education has become a system that "depend[s] upon overwork at every level in order to function" (2016, p. 39). Unsurprisingly, these changes to institutional structure and expectation are producing a grave toll on academics' wellbeing on all fronts: physical, mental, and emotional.

*Weaponising resilience*

A survey of UK academics undertaken in 2020 to investigate rates of satisfaction with university management and governance found

> an acute situation of endemic bullying and harassment, chronic overwork, high levels of mental health problems, general health and wellbeing problems, and catastrophically high levels of demoralisation and dissatisfaction across the UK HE sector. (Erickson, Hanna & Walker, 2020, p. 15)

Universities' attempts to address this exhaustion and anxiety are hampered by the impossibility of admitting the systemic nature of their causes. Hall and Bowles note dryly that "efforts by institutions to offer remedial actions while still disavowing the origins of the crisis that these remedies seem to address .... introduce contradictions that require skilful executive reframing" (2016, p. 39). The result is that structural injuries are delegitimised by a toxic narrative of individual deficiency that "systematically reframe[s] our experiences in personal terms so that the solution becomes trying to develop your 'resilience quotient' rather than organising for change" (Gill, 2017, p. 12).

This narrative of individual deficit forces workers to conceal any struggle to achieve the required standard of performativity. Gill notes that insecurity engenders an "extreme pressure to be 'uncomplaining' – to present a pleasing and happy countenance ... the production of which could be understood as instantiating a further layer of injury" (2017, p. 5). This enforced self-censorship burdens yet further the already anxious and inauthentic self with a requirement "to keep on smiling and saying 'yes' whilst inside every fibre of your being is screaming 'No-o-oo'" (p. 5).

The anxiety created by the academy's relentless productivity demands is, in fact, a deliberate mechanism, not an accidental by-product. As Erickson, Hanna and Walker write, "inherent in the indicator fetishism characterising HE is a fundamental notion that if people are not constantly threatened, they do not do enough" (2020, p. 4). Academic labour has become "the continuous

generation of a hyperactive form of anxiety [by which] the human limits of the academic worker are continuously overruled" (Hall & Bowles, 2016, p. 41). The neoliberal university thus exists not in spite of but *because of* the anxiety, self-censoring, and performative professionalism that it creates in its workers.

**The library as contested territory: provision, pedagogy and vocational awe**

Amid the rapacious commodification of education, there is a temptation to see libraries as intellectual sanctuaries exempt from market forces, proudly upholding a long inheritance of knowledge, enlightenment and culture (Motin, 2009; Kendrick, 2017; Ettarh, 2018; Hays & Studebaker, 2019). As Motin notes, "There is a presumption that libraries exist on a higher plain; that they are places of refuge, bastions of freedom and evidence of civilization at its best" (2009, 291). Ettarh's groundbreaking work on vocational awe highlights how the profession's own rhetoric "borders on vocational and sacred language rather than acknowledging that librarianship is a profession or a discipline" (2018).

In reality, however, this idealised perception of libraries as timeless, leisured, and cultured spaces is veneered onto a working environment that shares the pressures of increasing casualisation, overwork and productivity suffered by academics, leaving library workers and other academic-related or professional staff vulnerable to the same systemic harms. Pleas for recognition of increasingly unachievable workloads can be construed as a failure to meet the required standard of vocational devotion: "In the face of grand missions of literacy and freedom, advocating for your full lunch break feels petty" (Ettarh, 2018).

Enabling equitable access to a resource-set smaller than the community it serves is both intricate and generally invisible to faculty and students, and is thus often a source of frustration to both library staff and faculty (Walter, 2008). Library workers must grapple with enormous complexities in scholarly materials provision, negotiating digital licences, subscriptions, journal bundles and access to other tightly controlled, high-cost information resources with closely guarded, frequently changing and often arcane pricing mechanisms. In an era when non-scholarly information is generally instant and seamless, the byzantine publishing conditions obstructing access to the knowledge produced, reviewed and edited by the academic community itself are incomprehensible and frustrating. Library workers are constantly required to compensate and apologise for the complexity and expense of scholarly materials, and to mask the resulting feelings of frustration, stress or low morale (Kendrick, 2017; Rogers, 2017; Ettarh, 2018).

Despite their expertise in the scholarly publishing landscape, however, library workers are generally perceived as support staff rather than knowledge workers in their own right. Their work is defined in terms of its subservience to academics' scholarly and pedagogical output (Sloniowski, 2016, p. 647) and their identity inextricably bound up with service to others, to the point where they are perceived less as individuals than a convenient embodiment of the classification system:

> [Librarians] serve from the basis of the library-as-place, embodying the attributes therein (e.g. a personified catalogue of information) .... a librarian's practice is service and they derive their identity through their practice. (Pierson, Goulding & Campbell-Meier, 2019, p. 419)

The uncritical adoption of customer service rhetoric (Hoadley, 1995) has exacerbated the erosion of library workers' expertise. A customer service approach both reflects and reinforces the marketised vision of education as the purchasing of a product. As a result, rather than pedagogic collaboration, research support and knowledge exchange, the work of library staff has increasingly become supply- and solution-focused, the classic "service with a smile" (Sloniowski, 2016, p. 660). Once again, the impact of a stressful environment is both concealed and further inflamed by self-censorship.

*Critical information literacy and the librarian identity*

Within the already tense landscape of academic information provision, I was still further an outlier in holding a full-time teaching post. Teaching-only posts remains relatively unusual in UK academic librarianship: most library workers are called on to support academic information practices alongside the increasing workload of collection management and digital resource provision. At the least, this support involves teaching source and authority evaluation, evidence discernment, and integrity in citation and attribution of others' work. However, many teaching librarians also engage with issues of structural inequalities, information privilege and social justice, an approach closely aligned with critical pedagogy and known as critical information literacy (CIL).

CIL directly addresses the ethical and socio-political contexts of knowledge (Tewell, 2018), exploring how, where and by whom it is created and communicated, and from whom it is withheld. CIL highlights structural inequalities including inequitable access to information; how knowledge intersects with power, exclusion and discrimination; and how libraries and other educational

institutions themselves participate in systems of oppression. For example, CIL rejects the consumerist framing of education, and interrogates and problematises neoliberalism within the academy (Lawson, Sanders & Smith, 2015).

Yet within a scholarly environment that defines librarians' role as resource caretakers (Hays & Studebaker, 2019, p. 1), there is a constant struggle to be recognised and supported as part of the university's pedagogic mission (McCluskey, 2011; Walter, 2008). As with academic developers and study skills staff, the teaching work of librarians tends to be perceived as auxiliary to the academic curriculum: a subordinate function which falls into 'support' rather than 'teaching' (Barkas, 2011, p. 265). Damagingly, this perception is often shared by library managers who see teaching as time denied to the more important work of collection management and reference desk staffing (Walter, 2008). Some also feel that library workers engaging in teaching are trespassing into academic territory, exceeding or transgressing their legitimate professional identity as providers of information materials and deferential subservience (Hays & Studebaker, 2019; Wheeler & McKinney, 2016). As a result, a commitment to CIL and to the liberatory vision of education may bring teaching librarians into conflict on two different fronts: with institutional expectations of librarians as service workers, and with their own library's values, culture and strategic positioning.

The extent and gravity of this conflict may only emerge slowly. I rarely discussed my teaching experiences, approach or philosophy with my supervisors, nor did they ask about the values, behaviours or intended learning outcomes I wanted to communicate to students. In none of my roles did a supervisor or manager ever observe any of my classes or workshops. As a result, it was a slow and mutually dismaying discovery that I was not, as my managers assumed, giving training session on 'the right way to use the catalogue'. While I worked to empower learners to question hegemonic narratives by examining how power, authority, and information privilege are constructed and sustained, my managers felt I should be directing students to expensive, under-used information products to increase their uptake.

This tension also manifested in the spaces I entered, and what I did in them. Rather than remaining within library walls, the majority of my time was spent outside of the building - not only in teaching but to meeting, co-designing learning with, and even mentoring academic colleagues. As my scholarly profile grew, conference presentations, keynotes, editorships and other forms of academic service also took me out of the library – ironically, to champion the unique contribution of library workers to teaching and learning.

I was deeply proud that colleagues locally and nationally found value in talking, working, and co-designing learning with me, but my persistent presence outside of the library space was seen as transgressing what a library professional should do and be. By failing to "serve from the basis of the library-as-place" (Pierson, Goulding & Campbell-Meier, 2019, p. 419), my behaviour affronted both cultural and customer service norms. My insistence that pedagogic values were different from, and in some cases oppositional to, the satisficing culture of customer service led to my being designated 'inappropriate', 'aggressive' and 'unprofessional'. And although I believed that those norms and culture could legitimately be questioned in the service of better teaching and learning, I finally came to understand that, in a service environment that values performative professionalism over agency, questioning itself constituted the greatest transgression.

**From survival to self-care: the strategies**

Faced with an irreconcilable tension between my own critical pedagogic values and the library's perception of professionalism as subservient, satisficing and - above all – silent, I began to take refuge in 'survival moments': small pockets of time when my brain became too overloaded by deadlines and dread to process anything. Hidden in a toilet cubicle, I would allow myself a few minutes to relinquish planning, producing and compulsive self-doubt, and simply drift: invisible, anonymous, aware only of my physical body and my breathing.

Such spaces cannot last, but they offer glimpses of an existence beyond the anxious performance of productivity and the exhausting maintenance of a compliant, customer-pleasing persona. My 'survival moments' made me dare to believe that making space to restore my energy and nourish self-belief could be something other than a theft of institutional time: that I could legitimately heal my fractured professional identity by valuing and replenishing the personal self.

Over time, two strategies helped me to move towards self-acceptance in the face of institutional narratives of insufficiency and unprofessionalism: the individual practice of meditation and the shared creative and supportive space of social writing.

*Being here: meditation on the breath*

Meditation is a way of recognising and reconnecting with the body, the breath, and impermanence.

> *Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in.*

> *Breathing out, I know that I am breathing out.*

I sit or lie quietly in a space where I am safe from disturbance, sometimes setting a timer for a short duration, and gently start to notice the breath. I remind myself that there is no need to consciously change, control or improve anything; nothing for me to do but lovingly accompany the body as it breathes itself.

> *Breathing in, my breath grows deep.*
> *Breathing out, my breath goes slowly.*

My aim is not to 'switch off', empty the mind, or *do* anything other than be aware of the breath on its journey: its temperature, its sound and rhythm, where I feel it in the body.

> *Breathing in, I feel calm.*
> *Breathing out, I feel ease.*

When my mind wanders and I find myself anxiously following a thought, I remind myself that this is not failure. In noticing that I'm no longer fully present, I have already chosen to return to the moment.

> *Breathing in, I smile.*
> *Breathing out, I release.*

By encouraging us to suspend judgement, one breath at a time, meditation enables us to pause from compulsively rehearsing and resolving past stories of both failure and triumph. In return, it invites us into full acceptance of the self, as it is, in that moment: to believe that we are enough, just as we are.

> *Dwelling in the present moment*
> *I know it is a wonderful moment.*

Meditation can open a space not just for relaxation of the mind and body but also for longer term development, often leading to profound change of the relationship with self. In simply trying to be open to the question 'What else is there?', we can find a compassionate way to go beyond dominant narratives of failure, resentment, loss and grief.

*Taking up space: supporting the writing self*

I was introduced to writing groups by a doctoral student in my first teaching librarian role, and they have been an integral part of my practice ever since. Social writing groups vary in format according to participants' needs, but generally use a light-touch structure based around setting and sharing goals for the session, timed writing periods, and post-session debriefing (Coonan, 2011). Unlike institutionally-sponsored writing retreats, writing groups are grassroots occurrences, organised and run by participants at times and in ways to suit themselves.

These focused pockets of time – often only an hour or two – foster an astonishing degree of productivity, but one that differs radically from the mechanistic production of quantifiable outputs demanded by the marketised university. Rather than striving to meet externally set targets, writing groups offer space to focus on the writing process itself and its embodiment in the individual. It is the participant who sets the goal, and they are accountable only to themselves and to the 'writing buddy' with whom they share that goal at the outset and afterwards reflect on how far it was achieved.

In the social writing sessions I attend and co-host now, we begin by asking one another a few important questions:

> What's going on for you just now?
>
> How much time do you have for writing today?
>
> What do you want to achieve within that time?
>
> Do you have everything you need to be warm and comfortable while you write?

These questions are a deliberate, gentle invitation to be present to the self as it is in this moment – to acknowledge our tiredness and vulnerability as much as our aspirations and ambitions. Like meditation, social writing focuses less on *doing* than on *being*, recognising that you cannot write without bringing the whole self to the task. It concentrates on the messy creativity of the writing process rather than the metricised and depersonalised output; and it invites participants to set goals with a clear and compassionate vision of what they can achieve within the limits of who, where and how they are on that particular day.

Social writing groups offer a safe space for authors to articulate the conditions – both institutional and personal – in which the writing is being created and by which it is profoundly affected. By nurturing not the written product but the person engaged in creating it, social writing offers the potential to recognise the structural nature of the shame logics (Shahjahan, 2019), personal deficit narrative (Gill, 2017) and anxious performativity generated by the neoliberal university.

**Discussion: restor(y)ing the self**

Although seemingly very different, both the individual practice of meditation and the collective practice of social writing are grounded in embracing the self as it is right now, in this moment, in this body. Crucially for academic wellbeing, both offer the potential for reframing narratives around productivity away from a model of individual responsibility and failure, towards a more realistic and healthful perspective that recognises structural conditions and pressures – a reframing that is imperative if we are to survive the continued rise in workloads, metricisation and demoralisation generated by the neoliberal university.

As Gill notes:

> What I have been struck by, again and again, in conversations with academics is the dominance of an individualistic register – a tendency to account for ordinary experiences in the academy through discourses of excoriating self blame, privatised guilt, intense anxiety and shame. (Gill, 2017, p. 11)

To meditate requires being able to create and hold a non-self-judgemental space, where it is not only permissible but essential to lay down (however briefly) guilt and blame, striving and grieving, and sit with the audacious recognition that not everything needs to be fixed right now. Despite its attempted reappropriation as a 'resilience tool' by many organisations, meditation remains a powerful tool of resistance to the individual deficit narrative (Kendrick, 2017; Shahjahan, 2015). To assert that in this moment *I am enough; I have done enough; I have value that transcends my outputs* is to tell a different story about personhood: one that defies the constant message that the self must do more, be more, in order to be considered adequate.

Allowing ourselves to suspend, even for a moment, the relentless pressure to perform empowers us to know there is something beyond the judgemental language of productivity:

> By 'being lazy' I am referring to being at peace with 'not doing' or 'not being productive,' living in the present, and deprivileging the need for a result with the passage of time. (Shahjahan, 2015, p. 489)

This act of "being lazy", or of 'just being' – resisting the relentless performance of productivity – is inherently subversive. It situates the person as primary rather than reducing them to a replaceable professional unit; it not only recognises but honours individual differences, limits and needs. In a system that continually assaults human limits, to assert even for a stolen moment that the self is enough is a powerful act of resistance: 'Self-care can be 'warfare', as Sara Ahmed and Audre Lorde both argue" (Gill, 2017, p. 12).

In considering the liberatory potential of social writing it is crucial to distinguish between grassroots, peer-accountable writing groups and institutionally-provided writing retreats and other opportunities designed to increase scholarly output and reputation. While institutional writing support can lead to greater productivity, increased understanding of the writing self, and better writing habits (Coonan, Warnes & Pratt-Adams, 2019), their fundamental purpose is not to nurture individuals but to produce outputs. In contrast, the person-centred approach of grassroots social writing groups focuses not on metricised productivity but on the wellbeing, wholeness and voice of the individual writer. Like teaching, this approach to writing invites a raw authenticity that has "as much to do with our shadows and limits, our wounds and fears, as with our strength and potentials" (Palmer, 1998, p. 10).

A whole-person approach to writing raises awareness of environmental and structural factors affecting the writer. Social writing groups can thus throw powerful light on the hidden harms caused by organisational values and culture. Time and again, I have seen how talking through what appear to be issues with individual writing or teaching practice in the peer-led, non-judgemental space of a writing group has surfaced deeper, structural issues in the academic environment. These range from power-enabled microaggressions – such as co-authors who contribute nothing to a shared paper but petulant criticism – to managerial shoulder-shrugging in the face of academic workload balance models that have failed and continue to fail. When these structural factors are surfaced and shared, they expose "the increasing desensitisation of academics to their own objectification" (Erickson, Hanna & Walker, 2020, p. 3), countering the narrative of personal deficiency that pathologises the individual.

Social writing, especially when practised with the same colleagues over time, can thus create a space of mutual support, co-mentoring, and radical honesty about challenges to the self. Although a writing partner cannot offer solutions to structural harms, the act of articulating and comparing experiences enables a transformative recognition of "collective injuries and struggles that are nonetheless always experienced as individual" (Gill, 2017, p. 3). It also highlights, once again, the importance of telling a different story: the urgent need to relocate the narrative of deficiency from the individual to a system that demands relentlessly yet withholds opportunity to generate and replenish creative energy.

**Conclusion**

I left librarianship because I could no longer recognise what my managers meant by 'teaching'; because our perceptions of what was owed to learners had become so divergent that all common ground appeared to be lost. I joyously entered a new identity as a postdoctoral researcher – a role I believed would admit me to a community with shared values and understandings of teaching, learning design, power and privilege. Scarcely two years later, I left that post too because I was unable to enact the "quantified self of neoliberal academia" (Gill, 2015, p. 9). I could not give the institution a sufficient number of internationally excellent publications for the UK Research Excellence Framework count; the title of my role underwent a contractual change, and I was no longer permitted to call myself a research fellow.

With the revoking of my job title, a second burnout occurred. The repeated failure to fulfil institutional expectations and enact the required professional persona, in two different roles, left me disorientated and doubting my abilities and value. Attempts to move sideways to postdoctoral positions at other institutions failed. After being signed off work for six weeks with depression and anxiety, I resigned from my post.

As Tokumitsu (2014) argues, "Few other professions fuse the personal identity of their workers so intimately with the work output." I grieved the loss of my research career, and also the teaching practice I had relinquished to move into it. The dissolution of not one but two professional identities set me personally adrift: without students and teaching, without research opportunities, without an institutional affiliation, I was unsure what or who was left. Suicide, while not actively appealing, seemed a rational option.

Crucially, the self-care practices I had developed to support my career enabled me also to deal with its dissolution. Meditation gave me space to suspend my mind's compulsive retelling of stories of failure. Released from the requirement to produce approved units of REFable output, my writing practice flourished in regular social writing sessions with an ex-colleague. Together, they opened the possibility of a full and joyful selfhood outside academia – an ending to the story that I could not have envisaged before.

Ironically, I remained heavily involved in academic service, including doctoral supervision, external moderation and examining, and membership of a research ethics board. The refuge of my meditation practice and the collegial creativity of social writing meant that I could give time and mind to the academic work I continued to love, so that it came to form part of the post-institutional identity I was constructing instead of being thrown overboard along with my job title. Through these practices I also found the courage to write this chapter and use it as an opportunity to explore and compassionately accept the grief and loss of professional identity, negotiating a more healthy relationship between it and my personhood.

Within a UKHE sector "eaten alive by corporate logic and relentless metrics of punitive accountability" (Erickson, Hanna & Walker, 2020, p. 14) the practices of meditation and social writing offer a compassionate and powerful resistance to institutional narratives of inadequacy and professional failure. They do not merely build resilience in the face of insatiable demands from systems that frame human limits as personal failure, but something far more important: the possibility and legitimacy of *resistance* to those systems. Through the self-compassionate practices of meditation and social writing, I was able to survive this assault upon the self and recognise my value outside the higher education marketplace – and acknowledge the impact of structural harm not only on myself but on colleagues and managers, recognising the rapacity of a neoliberal narrative that denies and undermines all our human limits.

Renouncing HE was my choice: it was a decision I made in a chaos of grief and hurt, yet I know now that it was made for reasons that honoured my selfhood and that remain sound today. It was an act not only of true self-care but of self-preservation. In the end, I did not run away: I walked away. And in doing so I chose to tell a different story, one that does not end in tragedy or triumph but in the joyfulness of the present moment. I did not just walk away from a toxic situation: I walked *towards* my own presence, personhood, and possibility.

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What then am I?

I am a work in progress until my last breath.

I am going into the dark, smiling.

I am walking away *and* walking towards.

I am more than my value in the workplace.

I am enough in this moment.

*As I am. As I am. All or not at all.*

**Notes**

The sentences in italics in the Introduction and Conclusion are from Joyce's *Ulysses*.

The guided meditation in the 'Strategies' section is from Thich Nhat Hanh's *The Blooming of a Lotus*.

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