Julia Nina Baumann

Contesting academic cultures of power abuse

Trigger Warning: This article addresses power abuse in academia and describes some such extreme boundary violations explicitly and in detail.1[1]

Abstract: The author examines how, under which promoting conditions academic power abuse takes place and how this behaviour is gradually "normalized" by academic structures and discourses. Drawing on ethnographic data from her research, next to autoethnographical testimonials, she shows – through the fictional case of Zora – how academic cultures of competition, dependency and precarity nurture power abuse. She furthermore analyses how the individual isolation within academic organizations and the lack of clear rules and unbiased authorities lead to a permanently self-perpetuating system of abuse.

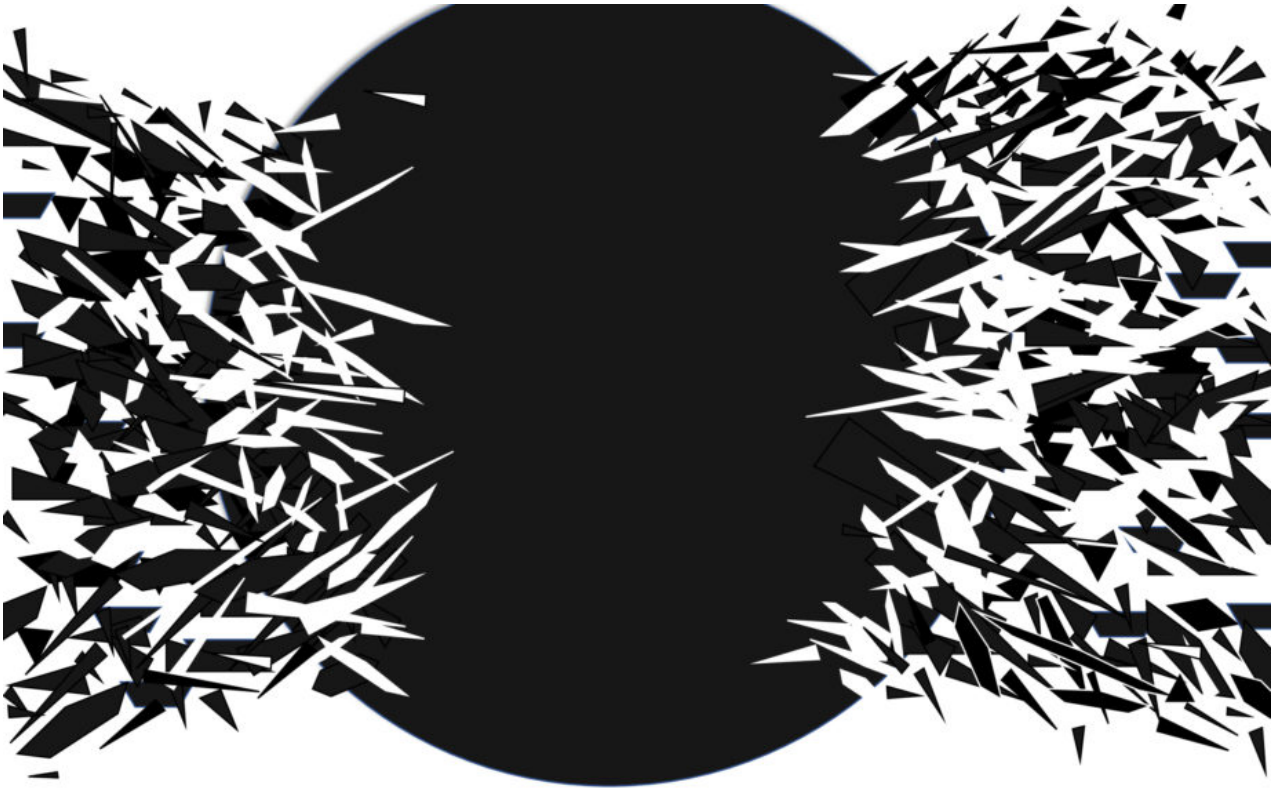

Illustration: Julia Nina Baumann, 2023.

Introduction: "Did he abuse his power?"

In spring 2022, German media reported the guilty verdict of a former university professor and head of department before the Göttingen Regional Court on charges of coercion, aggravated assault in office and deprivation of liberty to eleven months suspended prison sentence (Mathy 2022; Hildebrandt 2022; NDR Aktuell 2022; RTL News 2022). He allegedly had beaten female doctoral students and a technician with a bamboo stick on the chest and bottom for three years "as a punishment". In court, he spoke of "consensual acts" intended to "improve" their performance. "You should thank me for this. I am doing this for you", the Professor is said to have told one supervisee (Hildebrandt 2022). However, he also allegedly locked the office doors and threatened to end their contracts if they did not comply. One of these reports' headlines captured my attention: "Hat er seine Macht missbraucht?" (Engl: Did he

abuse his power?, RTL News 2022). This question mark kept me irritated, as it felt like a suggested doubt about the court-proofed guilt (with the judge quoted literally saying, “The acts were about the exercise of power). It left the reader with the unpleasant feeling of unjustified accusations, that given his role as a superior the professors doing was “reasonable”, “normal” rather than “abusive”.

In the following blog post, I will deal with precisely this querying feeling regarding academic power abuse. I wonder: What are the academic discourses in Germany, to what extent does it take place, and how does the academic community negotiate it? My analysis will be based on various media reports, publicly available statements, or testimonials. But I will draw the core data from my ethnographic fieldwork 2019-2022[2], which is part of my doctoral project on the emotional experience of ethnographers in everyday academic life[3].

During my research, I received particularly vivid and frequent reports of passion and joy, fear (see Baumann 2022) and distress (see Baumann 2023), and rage and revenge feelings in everyday academic life. In addition, it was, above all, the frequent descriptions of violations of personal boundaries within academic spaces that still haunt me. Knowing that I only talked to a small percentage of people, it was still striking that about half of them had experienced situations that made them feel more than unwell. None of them used the label “power abuse” or “academic misconduct”. The interviews accompanying emotions, however, indicated great fear, shame, sadness, anger, and fatalism facing these memories.

Often people told me this experience caused severe mental health issues, making them think about leaving academia. Without exception, all interviewees stated they were worried about the consequences, such as losing their jobs, if the cases became public. None of the interviewees said they felt safe reporting the situation to their institution. It is, therefore, challenging to decide how and in what level of detail I should discuss these incidents here. The danger of revealing the identity of my interlocutors by reporting specific details is also profound, considering the relatively small community of German ethnographers. Researching and writing about

academic power abuse is thus a methodological and ethical challenge. Furthermore, the voyeurism of the bystander/uninvolved reader is mainly nourished by the particularly disgusting details, mostly at the expense of the injured parties. Nevertheless, I consider it essential, especially in the sense of "academic activism" and engaged anthropology, to describe certain unpleasant situations in their explicitness and brutality to make them perceptible to the reader and to underline the importance of a structural change in academia. Silence can also mean a reproduction of a system of power that tends to protect "the perpetrators". Therefore, I have decided to use autoethnographic testimonials that have already been made public. Next to these I have condensed descriptions from my interviewees to the fictional case of Zora. Zora is hence an utterly fictional person, but her story described here is composed of interview excerpts from several interlocutors I assembled and translated to English. Her story and the autoethnographic descriptions shall make visible the diversity of academic power abuse and the circumstances under which ethnographic knowledge is sometimes generated. Following Zora's story, the importance of such visibility is evident in my analysis of an academic culture that often encourages power abuse for various reasons[4]. I want to conclude this text with an appeal for solidarity and suggestions for addressing this situation at different levels.

Zora or stories of an academic culture of power abuse

„All my academic life, I have examined power relations in other areas [...]. However, this theoretical knowledge did not equip me to deal with the power relationships in the university, which were penetrated by the same issues that I studied in contexts outside the academy" (Bravo-Moreno, 2022: 141).

Zora, my fictional post-doctoral student at a German university, meets with me shortly after the end of Ramadan. Zora's parents are from Bosnia-Herzegovina and had emigrated to Germany during the Bosnian War. Zora has grown up in Germany

for most of her life. She had just started a new job and had to relocate to another city. Her contract is limited to two years, and she still determines what will happen afterwards.
Zora tells me about her former PhD supervisor: “Just imagine, she contacted me again the other day, super friendly and slimy. I find that really weird; as soon as I graduated, she suddenly became super nice, but she was such a monster during my dissertation.” I asked how she found her supervision back then: “I had been looking for a supervisor for ages. With my topic… Well, it wasn’t easy. In addition, I came from England and was not well connected in Germany. I just googled her and wrote to her. She did not answer me at first. Nevertheless, later we met at a conference, and after hearing my talk, she accepted me as her student. Man, was I happy! Everything depended on it, including the application for external funding and so on.”

“‘So where are you from?’ I have answered this question so many times that I know what they really want to ask […]. This is followed by another obvious inquiry that I also receive quite too often, ‘Why do you sound different?’ or more boorish comment, ‘Oh, your English is good.’ […]. My input is valuable – as long as it benefits the Whites […]. (Kim 2020: 498-501).

Zora describes her supervision at the beginning as a particularly fruitful time: “She really made an effort with the enrolment and the bureaucratic stuff. But to be honest, since I finished and have been thinking about it for so long, there have already been red flags. For example, one time, we were sitting in her office, and she asked me out of the blue if I was a lesbian by any chance. I was completely overwhelmed with the question, and I think I just said, ‘I don’t think so’, and then she said something like, ‘Well, it’s a pity; there’s probably nothing we can do about that …’. With such a strange pause at the end! And I just kept silent, and then she said: ‘Well, after all, you are from Bosnia, and you are a woman; one can tell that from your name. Diversity is on everyone’s lips now; so it’s easier to get applications through. So that’s a good thing’. In the beginning I didn’t think it was that bad; I thought

somehow, she really wanted to help me get money for my project. But later, I talked to other fellow PhD candidates, and one of them told me that she had mentioned to only have accepted him because 'he looked so foreign' [...]. It's fascinating [ironically]. She has never managed to spell my name correctly in all these years. She couldn't even manage Zora and always called me Sarah. It's really weird, I didn't think it was that bad, but today it really upsets me."

"You haven't done much research and you are not in any leadership role. This means that you need to teach these units. [...] I have given you a couple of points for fiddle-diddle-dee and tra-la-la, which is more than generous. You have to take these classes to make up the rest" (Yoo 2020: 3177).

Zora: "But later, it got worse. And she didn't do anything anymore, didn't answer emails and so on. It went so far that I couldn't submit my application on time because her signature was missing. She really didn't care how we got the money for our research. My impression is she was nice until I signed the supervision contract, and everything was on the website, and she got her money and her reputation, and from then on, she didn't care about me anymore except unless it benefited her. [...] And I still had the feeling at the beginning that she was somehow disappointed in me because I hadn't delivered yet. And I worked more and more. I didn't even do weekends anymore at that time. She also made these hints like "I wonder if it's going to work out with you...". That was really a hard time, I had to work as a waitress and still had a 20-hour job outside academia, but money was always short, and I also had to work on all these grant applications and prepare my research. I did all of this without any help from her, but a lot of begging for her signatures."

"He [superior academic] started intimidating people who disagreed with his decisions and argued and defended himself with arguments drawn from the discourse of meritocracy and academic excellence. Under the guise of weak academic performance, he reduced the influence of 'difficult' academics by spreading negative information about them" (Zawadski/Jensen 2020: 403-05).

Zora: “When she got in touch, it was always totally unpredictable. She was nice and understanding by mail and promised me to take care at one point, and then there were again months-long phases in which she was simply disappearing, not talking to me or acting as if I wasn’t there. I even met her in person at a workshop, and she totally ignored me and didn’t even say hello. […] It always felt to me like I had done something wrong, and she was ignoring me because of it. […] In the end, I think I was just desperate and would have done anything. […] And then she needed to move from one flat to another. She ‘asked’ us to help. [..] And we all just stood there and slaved away for her, and she bossed us around all the time, and I was grateful to do that. […] It’s really crazy when I think about it today. But at that time, I didn’t understand. I just projected it all on me. I really became super depressed during that time. On this day, she invited us all out for a beer as a Thank you and said something about how great it was, that we were all such good friends and that this was now our new family and so on. […] I didn’t really realize what was going on until she offered me to take over one of her courses. By “offered”, I mean she demanded it from me because it was part of my role as a doctoral student, as she said. I mean, think of it, I didn’t even have funding and no help from her and was supposed to teach one of her courses for free, which she was paid for. That just opened my eyes, and I started to look for another supervision”.

“After coming to the conclusion that she never read anything I gave her, I decided to change to another doctoral supervisor. When I informed her of this, she threatened to write a negative report on my academic progress so that my ESRC doctoral scholarship would stop paying me“ (Bravo-Moreno 2002: 143-44).

Zora: “I then found a job in this project, and it was clear that I would be supervised there. I wrote her a kind “apology mail” and said that I couldn’t keep my head above water any other way. She called me immediately and said something on the phone about how we could do it together and that we would find a solution, and that I would just have to search a bit more. I then told her that I could no longer manage

this financially and that I had hoped for more help from her, which is why I had already signed the contract for the other project. And she really freaked out. She said that I was ungrateful and that she had done so much for me and whether I would think that I could demand special treatment here and that I would feel as if I was someone better, and that I wouldn't have the strength for a doctoral thesis anyway… and so on, and then she just hung up. And I apologized again by mail and called back again, but she has not spoken to me – until now. […] After that, I felt really bad for a long time. I wondered all the time what I did wrong and then really needed the reassurance that it was ok what I did […]. Especially because you hear stories all the time that things are going badly in other areas as well. At a friend's cohort, for example, the doctoral students always had to look after the supervisor's children and babysit to give him the time to read any of their texts, and I've also heard of really racist, discriminatory comments. All that horror stories out there … it kind of makes you believe that this is just the way and you got lucky with yours […]. At some point later, I heard from other doctoral students that he had dropped out because he couldn't take it anymore with her. For me, he was always the absolute high-flyer, the one I thought wouldn't mind at all and somehow also her 'favourite'. And he was the one who broke it off. We should have exchanged more, but somehow, I don't know. No one really dared to do that. You didn't know what would be passed on to whom."

"I am a rape victim: The five most difficult words I have trouble admitting to people in academia. […] There are stereotypes and labels ascribed to female professionals, including being too emotional, involving too much of their personal lives, or not being able to concentrate on work-related tasks […]. Knowing the stereotypes toward women and the racial discriminatory climate in higher education, I gave my utmost effort to hide emotions and separate my personal life in order to be 'professional' with hopes of being treated equally (Kim 2020: 496).

Zora: "In my second project, I managed to finish, of course, with quite a delay. It was still a tough time, especially the time pressure, and the financial pressure was pretty

intense. Especially as an anthropologist, when you also have to do fieldwork, which stirs you up in a completely different way anyway. [...] My fieldwork was really not that easy for me mentally, and then to come back and to evaluate and publish so quickly, that was really difficult for me, and I really had a low point again. [...] There was also a situation with a cis-male colleague of mine. He was already a post-doc in the project at the time. We always had meetings in which someone presented their work, and we were also supposed to talk explicitly about difficulties. So, I once talked about my field experience and my difficulties transcribing my material. [...] I still find that really hard to talk about. I already have a lump in my throat.... Ok, anyway, after the talk, I started crying a little, and I was super annoyed that this happened to me in front of everyone and that I didn't manage my emotions well enough. But everyone was really understanding, especially this one colleague. He also smoked with me and offered help. [...] Later, we went out for dinner and a drink, and the evening was really nice, and I needed that because I was in such an extremely vulnerable state of mind and so desperate. I was really under pressure at this time also, because my contract expired in some month and I knew that I really needed to speed it up, but I just couldn't. He told me he knew the head of department well and would put in a good word for me. [...] Well, of course, there was a lot of alcohol, which is often the case at these academic events, I feel. It's unpleasant to talk about that now, to be honest. But it came to such a somewhat strange moment. He kept coming on to me like that, and then, well, I don't know how it happened, but he somehow just grabbed my arm and kissed me. I was taken by surprise and somehow didn't want that either, and then all these thoughts came into my head that he was so nice and wanted to help me as a superior, and then I just went numb and stiff inside and somehow let it just happen. [...] When he let me go, I went home very quickly. I just went to bed that night to sleep it off. But the next morning, I felt so strange, like disgusted by myself and ... so ashamed, and I found everything so repulsive. I was totally afraid that someone had noticed. [..] He then contacted me several times and asked if we wanted to go out, and I always politely denied it. [...] Well, and then he started to ask for my data. He told me that if I wanted his help, I should send him everything,

including my field diaries, and that he would consider then to cooperate and to help me. I thought that this was a bit strange. He was actually researching in a completely different field. I somehow had a very bad gut feeling. I answered that I would not like to give the data out of my hand because it was still in a raw state and not anonymized, and so on. And from then on, he started to send me at least five emails a day and tried to persuade me… In the end, I didn't even answer anymore. […] Later, I found out that he was seriously registered with a lecture on the topic, like my topic and my talk from before, at a conference. And I found out that he had started telling everyone I had developed feelings for him and couldn't handle his rejection. It was so embarrassing. [..] I talked to my colleague about whether I should report it. And she said I should rather do nothing because, in the end, they would all believe him anyway. So I left it alone."

„In the weeks following my complaint, colleagues, friends, and supporters began to distance themselves from me or cut off support altogether […]. The social ostracization, coupled with institutional betrayal, was an unbearable burden to carry; over the course of the complaint, I became suicidal and was subsequently hospitalized" (Petit-Thorne 2023: 163).

The startling numbers – Power abuse at universities, a well-known phenomenon

"One reason why misconduct in the form of power abuse occurs so frequently in academia is sure that the scientific system offers a tempting situation with various power imbalances" (Lasser/Täuber 2023, translation JB).

In my research, academic settings have often been described as a workplace that not only encourages unethical behaviour but where such boundary crossings are even rewarded (also described in Lassers and Täubers quotation above). Zora's story or the testimonials are not singular cases (Lipinsky et al., 2022; Pritchard/Edwards 2023; Nature PhD survey 2019; Chakraborty/Machurich 2020; Olsthoorn et al. 2020; Striebing et al. 2021; Beadle et al. 2020; Peukert et al. 2020; Woolston 2020). As

alarming numbers from several studies have shown for many years, power abuse occurs in very different forms, at different levels and with very high frequency in everyday academic life. For example, more than every second female academic has experienced some form of sexual harassment at University (Lipinsky et al. 2022), with half of the perpetrators being faculty members and the assaults mostly taking place in everyday university locations, such as offices, lecture halls or cafeterias (Feltes et al. 2012). Overall, the findings show female-read, non-binary people, the LGBTIQ* community, and people from third countries and BiPoC tend to be more likely to experience abuse in general (Olsthoorn et al 2020; Woolston 2020). The numbers exceed mostly those of the total population in representative studies by far, thus pointing to a peculiarity in academic cultures. Therefore, Bondestam and Lundqvist (2020: 398) speak of a "global epidemic" in higher education, especially regarding sexual misconduct. Although academic bullying and power abuse have recently received increased attention (Mahmoudi 2019), primarily due to the discussions about academic precarity (see call of German professors against power abuse: Winkler 2023). Authors such as Pritchard and Edwards (2023: 2) emphasize that the institutional handling of such incidents, although known for many years, is "worrying". Many studies show that university-based supporting infrastructure often seems poorly known, and cases are not reported (Pritchard 2023; Chakraborty/Machurich 2020). About 13% of the doctoral student respondents in a survey of the Max Planck Society even reported explicitly negative consequences after filing a report of scientific misconduct (Olsthoorn et al. 2020). There are also various first-hand accounts, like Schneider (2020) describing the bureaucratic hurdles in the neoliberal University she had to face after being raped in the field; Bravo-Moreno (2022) autoethnographically reporting how the academic world was "demystified" by various experiences of power abuse (sexism, racism and more); Kim (2020) dealing with academic imperialism and racism as a Korean-American; Yoo (2020) coping with being a mother and an academic at the same time; Petit-Thorne (2023) describing her struggles filing a complaint for sexual assault of and on campus; and Zawadzki and Jensen (2020) addressing academic bullying through an

autoethnographic reflection – just to name a few.

Academic structures nurturing power abuse – Dependencies and precarities in a competitive world

"The trouble with the academic status system is that a general improvement in everyone's status is difficult, since status depends most of all on comparisons with immediate colleagues. When one person's status goes up, the (perceived) relative status of others goes down. As a consequence, the successes of colleagues are often resented rather than welcomed" (Martin, 1996).

Following the numbers, power abuse seems to be thriving in academia. The reasons for this lie in an academic culture of dependency and precarity. Dependencies are not only located in classic superior-subordinate relationships but are often established also in much more subtle ways in all academic areas through class, race, status, gender, or social and cultural capital.

Supervisors in Germany, for example, often have dual roles that enable them not only to supervise but also to evaluate and grade the candidate. They are also often heads of the projects providing funding (Ohm 2022; Täuber/Lasser 2023). Following Cohen and Baruch (2022: 505 f.) to "the dark side of supervision", students hence become "knowledgeable, bright, and inexpensive labour, which makes them ideal targets". They point out that especially in supervision, ethical problems such as abuse, exploitation, misappropriation of a student's work, harassment, and racism even have become some academic tradition (see also Martin 2013, Löfström/Pyhältö 2020). At the same time, supervisors play a significant role in the later careers of their supervisees (Gardner 2007). Therefore, the high levels of power abuse in this relationship often have far-reaching consequences. This imbalance of power is particularly reflected in the German term "Doktorvater" (Doctoral father) and its later-developed equivalent "Doktormutter (doctoral mother). The strong, almost familial connection between supervisor and supervisee is linguistically underscored

here, as is the supervisor, who – unlike with true offspring – makes a harsh selection of their "children" (Ohm 2022: 22). Moreover, academic relationships often go beyond a simple, platonic working relationship. Supervisors see themselves less as superiors with personnel responsibility, and PhD candidates do not see themselves as employees. In this context, these brutal work hierarchies, often compared to a feudal system (Ohm 2022: 23), lead to affective strain on both sides. These personal unions, the strong dependencies, and the simultaneously strongly promoted identification with the academic work make assaults particularly difficult to deal with emotionally (Cohen/Baruch 2022: 508).

However, the power imbalance at universities also affects those who have supposedly already reached the top. Individuals, professors, or research group leaders in German academia often decide on a position or grant. With simultaneous job insecurity and an increased precarity up to the professorial ranks, the fear of losing one's job or funds remains crucial. Residence permits for third-country scholars are then predominantly determined by a superior's decision. Also, other socially marginalized groups thus fall into a particular dependency. The feeling, often described to me, of having to be constantly re-examined even on a professor's contract in the competitive academic culture and with competition-based strict selection adds to the mental pressure on scholars. Neo-liberalization, focus on excellence and the competitive orientation of universities, and changes in management and evaluation, lead to more significant mental distress (Llosa et al. 2018; Bravo-Moreno 2022: 151). However, the mental well-being of their employees is rarely part of the institutional agenda (Baumann 2023). It is then not uncommon for other colleagues to be understood as competitors. Yamada et al. (2014) have identified a clear link between this precarity and power abuse in Canadian higher education: Their study demonstrated that supervisors with insecure job positions were significantly more likely to engage in bullying behaviours. Moreover, the academic system of reputation, impact factor, and publish or perish also seems even to reward academic misconduct or bullying (such as usurping authorship credit for

one's progress) (Cohen/Baruch 2022; Zawadzki/Jensen 2020: 401; Martin, 2013).

Institutional silencing and structural individualization

"Although they claim neutrality, universities often minimize and keep confidential corrective actions against bullies, probably for the sake of the institution's reputation, the desire to protect their most prolific and well-known scientists, and the fear of being sued by the targets of bullying" (Cohen/Baruch 2022: 513).

In conjunction with the points mentioned above, institutional culture also plays a major role: The fragmentation and bureaucratization of university processes, the lack of clear sets of rules or responsible authorities, and the precarious working conditions characterized by many changes lead to ever greater isolation within organizations. As described above, this gives a few individuals a high degree of decision-making power. At the same time, as my research showed, academics identify less with their specific universities than with "academia" or their subject "per se". They see themselves as part of a fluid bigger picture and rarely understand themselves as part of a team or a working group. This often leads to individuals being left to deal with abuse by themselves. Those who have networked best become powerful stabilizers of these abuse cultures. Questioning power positions is then often understood as an attack on the entire organization (Pritchard 2023). Abusive systems can thus reproduce themselves unhindered (Petit-Thorne 2023: 329ff.).

Conducive to this is an academic culture in which emotions are fundamentally understood as "unprofessional". The emotional self-reduction (Baumann 2022; 2023) inherent in this culture can also be observed regarding power abuse. For example, many interviewees told me that the intense emotions only arose long after the incident and often only after they had left the institution. Some described the time during the incidents as a kind of "emotional shock paralysis" in which they forced themselves, their bodies and minds, to continue to "function." Most did not report and remained guarded with their colleagues. The feeling of being powerless, as well

as the fear of possible consequences due to strong dependencies (Cohen/Baruch 2022; Baumann 2022), often led to power abuse being accepted or simply endured. Thurmann (2023: 89) describes this condition as "fear of aggravating one's own situation" that "leads to the acceptance of the present oppressive order". Dealing with abuse, therefore, remains a balancing act, which was described to me as often only possible after the end of one's academic career. Instead, those affected found unique ways of dealing with the situation. Often this included avoidance tactics (i.e., avoidance of events in the institutional context). However, this often damages one's career, leading to exclusion from academic networks, and thus to the isolation of the affected individuals (Petit-Thorne 2023: 159; Baruch/Cohen 2022: 506), as well as adds a strong mental burden on top. According to Baruch/Cohen (2022), this strain can also lead to attempted misconduct since Krasikova et al. (2013) proved that destructive behaviour is more likely if it has already been observed in another or experienced by oneself. The individual departments' ethical culture has thus a considerable influence on the reinforcement of these structures.

Although the scientific community has established supposedly clear rules for good scientific practice, they usually need to improve in other forms of misconduct. A Code of Conduct, in which institutions clearly state which limits may not be transgressed, often does not exist. Sanctions for abusive behaviour tend to be lax (Lasser/Täuber 2023). Al Jazeera (Al Jazeera 2021), for example, found out that the majority (almost 90%) of complaints of sexual misconduct stated at British universities did not result in any consequences. "Victims" are often discouraged from approaching the University with their cases, and complaints are stylized as bureaucratic hurdles (Ahmed 2021; Schneider 2020). At the same time, powerful "perpetrators" are often covered by academic alliances according to "the tacit principle of 'you scratch my back and I will scratch yours'" (Bravo-Moreno 2022: 151).

Exploiting a position of power has almost become a "tradition" in some parts of academia. In some disciplines, for example, it is widespread for superiors to become

co-authors on papers to which they have contributed neither in terms of content nor through their research. This is the first small indication that academia's rules are not infrequently morally softened in everyday academic culture, leading to a self-enforcing dynamic: The reported cases and the mild or non-existent sanctioning lead to a gradual "normalization" of such behaviour. In my research, I often encountered narratives of "well-known" "perpetrators" whose abuse remained institutionally ignored. At the same time, it leads those affected to question their own feelings more and more and to speak out less and less often. The academic culture, neo-liberalization and the principle of competition at universities, harsh hierarchies, and the increasing precarity strengthen the possibilities for power abuse, protect "perpetrators", and underpin an organization's silence – as also shown in the Göttingen case from the introduction:

The University of Göttingen had already documented complaints about the Professor in 2017. When asked by the institution, the defendant only admitted to sometimes lacking "professional distance". Disciplinary proceedings were paused until after the verdict to the present time. The Professor continues to pursue his scientific activities, such as publishing papers or attending conferences. He also continues to receive his full state civil service salary (NDR Aktuell 2022; Mathy 2022). At least one of the affected persons is an international student who states that she first had to find her way in the German university culture making her vulnerable for abuse. All of the affected persons stated that they had been working under precarious conditions depending on the sake of their superior (Hildebrandt 2022; Mathy 2022). The verdict is received with disappointment by most. They complain about the University's lack of willingness to clarify the situation and to even have tried to discourage them from pressing charges (Hildebrandt 2022). One of the victims even stated that she "felt humiliated a second time" (NDR Aktuell 2022).

Finding our voices – why knowledge production must be contested

I have tried to show in this text how, under which promoting conditions, academic abuse of power can take place and how abusive behaviour is gradually "normalized" by academic structures and discourses. Drawing on these analyses, it has become clear that academic cultures must fundamentally live through a radical change. Academia must set a good example and seriously adhere to its own rules. Otherwise, it will lose its credibility. Scientific institutions must protect their employees from abuse. Otherwise, they will soon no longer find any. Now academia continues to lose dedicated talent (see PhD dropout rates). Mental distress among staff and students must be acknowledged and its systemic causes addressed. Institutions and their members must take a clear stance against power abuse. We cannot denounce power imbalances in other countries and leave our own without comment.

A cultural change thus will only be made after a while. It requires in-depth scientific research and analysis. The significant debates about power imbalances in the research process in social and cultural anthropology, for example, in the famous writing culture debate of the 1980s, should hence not be understood as closed. What ethnographic research means and under which conditions it is forged should still be reflected permanently. This cannot refer exclusively to ethnographic fieldwork but must include the entire process of knowledge generation. It is, therefore, an absolute necessity that "knowledge generated through research is [...] contested to an extent unprecedented", as stated in the CfP. Here it is not so much the already established knowledge as such but rather what is left unsaid or even forbidden to be said that accompanies the creation of such knowledge. After all, this cultural change will be challenging to achieve, and it will take time, as it will shake the established foundations of institutions, manifested norms and values, and ingrained everyday practices. Academic analysis alone, however, will not be able to achieve such a change. It is necessary on an institutional level to develop structures that actively avoid power abuse and support the affected person instead of leaving them alone. Organizations must be forced to actively stand up for the safety of their members and position themselves accordingly. It is hence essential for researchers to also find

their voices as activists within academia. Latest movements, such as #ichbinhanna, #ichbinreyhan, #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo or #CiteBlackAuthors have laid a particularly important foundation here. At the same time, however, it is crucial that these movements also fall on fertile ground in established academic circles. Solidarity for one another is undoubtedly a first step here.

Footnotes

[1]In the following essay, I understand academic power abuse as an umbrella term for various forms of misconduct and power abuse within academic settings. Part of this term is, therefore, forms of sexual harassment (following Pritchard/Edwards 2023), including many types of unwelcome verbal and physical sexual attention (such as being sent sexually explicit images), sexual assault (such as rape), stalking, discrimination and disadvantage based on class, race, gender, religion or appearance, racism, bullying, academic misconduct in connection with power abuse (such as publishing someone else's work under one's name) and any form of assault, threats or coercion (physical, and non-physical/verbal) directed at a subordinate from a position of power (such as threatening to terminate supervision unless particular extra work is done) and bullying (following Zawadzki/Jensen 2020), which include for example spreading rumours, social isolation, silent treatment, verbal aggression, attacking an employee's performance, or attitudes and private life, I encountered all the examples mentioned here in one way or another in my research. In some cases, it is difficult to distinguish this from scientific misconduct (e.g. plagiarism). It must therefore be emphasized that the boundaries here are fluid. I do not aim for completeness in this list but consider this umbrella term as a working definition from the field, which does not follow any legal standards.

[2] I conducted over 40 semi-structured online interviews with a diverse range of ethnographers from different disciplines and backgrounds (in terms of class, gender,

age, and ethnicity), next to informal talks and participant observations. For a more detailed methodological reflection, see Baumann 2022. This paper is also part of my cumulative PhD, so small sections overlap with other publications of mine.

[3] I am genuinely grateful to all those who shared their emotional experience with me. Without them, this article would not have come to life.

[4] Trying to reflect on this holistically, it is wrong to assume a strict dualism between "perpetrators" and "victims" of power abuse. I hence see all persons involved in those situations as part of a system of power that determines them in one way or another and that also grants certain but very different degrees of agency. As an engaged and activist anthropologist, I write this text out of deep solidarity and companionship with those affected and a desire to make academia a less hostile space in the long run.

References

Ahmed, S. (2021). Complaint!, Durham: Duke University Press.Al Jazeera Investigation Unit (2021). Degrees of Abuse. UK universities do not probe bulk of sexual misconduct reports: https://www.ajiunit.com/article/uk-universities-do-not-probe-bulk-of-sexual-misconduct-reports/

Baumann, J. N. (2022). The ethnographers' fear to feel – Manoeuvring through an affective community of no-feeling within the academe, Emotions and Society 4(3), 375-394. https://doi.org/10.1332/263169021X16632021773516.

Baumann, J.N. (2023). Academies of silence – The institutional dealing with mental and emotional distress before and after the pandemic in Germany, in 04_Radical Health, intercomverlag, Zürich, 2023 (in press).

Beadle, B., Do, S., El Youssoufi, D., Felder, D., Gorenflos López, J., Jahn, A., Pérez-Bosch Quesada, E., Rottleb, T., Rüter, F., Schanze, J.-L., Stroppe, A.-K., Thater, S., Verrière, A., & Weltin, M. (2020). Being a Doctoral Researcher in the Leibniz Association. 2019 Leibniz PhD Network Survey Report. Leibniz PhD network.

Bondestam, F. and Lundqvist, M. (2020). Sexual harassment in higher education – a systematic review. European Journal of Higher Education: 10(4), 397–419.

Bravo-Moreno, A. (2022). Demystifying the academy. Resistance, ethics and abuse of power, in Power and Education 14(2), 140–156. https://doi.org/10.1177/17577438211068283.

Chapman, C. A., Bicca-Marques, J. C., Calvignac-Spencer, S., Fan, P., Fashing, P. J., Gogarten, J., Guo, S., Hemingway, C. A., Leendertz, F., Li, B., Matsuda, I., Hou, R., Serio-Silva, J. C., & Chr. Stenseth, N. (2019). Games academics play and their consequences: How authorship, h -index and journal impact factors are shaping the future of academia. Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences 286(1916), 20192047. https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2019.2047

Cohen, A. and Y. Baruch (2022). Abuse and Exploitation of Doctoral Students: A Conceptual Model for Traversing a Long and Winding Road to Academia, in Business Ethics 180,505–522. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-021-04905-1.

Feltes, T., K. List, R. Schneider, S. Höfker, A. Balloni, R. Bisi, R. Sette, J. Czapska, M. Klosa, E. Lesińska, E. Bodelon, N. Igareda, G. Casas, P. Stenning, T. Mitra-Kahn and C. Gunby (2012). Gender-based Violence, Stalking and Fear of Crime: https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/SharedDocs/downloads/EN/p

ublikationen/Gender-based%20violence,%20stalking%20and%20fear%20of%20crime.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2

Fernando, D., & Prasad, A. (2019). Sex-based harassment and organizational silencing. How women are led to reluctant acquiescence in academia. Human Relations, 72(10), 1565–1594. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726718809164

Gardner, S. K. (2007). 'I heard it through the grapevine'. Doctoral student socialization in chemistry and history, in Higher Education 54(5), 723–740. https:// doi. org/ 10. 1007/ s10734- 006- 9020-x.

Hildebrandt, Paul (2022). Sexualisierte Gewalt an Studentinnen. Auf seinem Tisch lag ein Stock, in Zeit Campus, 25. Juni 2022: https://www.zeit.de/campus/2022/04/sexualisierte-gewalt-studentinnen-universitaet-goettingen-aufarbeitung/komplettansicht#comments (last accessed: Apr 2023).

Kim, H. J. (2020). 'Where are you from? Your English is so good'. A Korean female scholar's autoethnography of academic imperialism in U.S. higher education, International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education 33:5, 491-507. DOI: 10.1080/09518398.2019.1681551.

Krasikova, D. V., Green, S. G. and J.M. LeBreton (2013). Destructive Leadership. A Theoretical Review, Integration, and Future Research Agenda, in Journal of Management 39(5), 1308–1338. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206312471388.

Langin, K. (2022). As professors struggle to recruit postdocs, calls for structural change in academia intensify [Data set]. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.caredit.add4693.

Lasser, J. and S. Täuber (2023). Machtmissbrauch in der Wissenschaft. Problembeschreibung und Lösungsansätze für Personalverwaltung und Personalentwicklung, Preprint: https://www.netzwerk-mawi.de/fileadmin/media/team/PDFs/Machtmissbrauch_in_der_Wissenschaft_Problembeschreibung_und_Loesungsansaetze_fuer_Personalverwaltung_und_Personalentwicklung.pdf.

Lipinsky, A., Schredl, C., Baumann, H., Humbert, A., & Tanwar, J. (2022). Gender-based violence and its consequences in European Academia, Summary results from the UniSAFE survey (No. 101006261). UniSAFE project: https://unisafe-gbv.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/UniSAFE-survey_prevalence-results_2022.pdf.

Llosa, J. A., Menéndez-Espina, S., Agulló-Tomás, E., & Rodríguez-Suárez, J. (2018). Job insecurity and mental health: A meta-analytical review of the consequences of precarious work in clinical disorders. Anales de Psicología, 34, 211–223.

Löfström, E. and Pyhältö, K. (2014). Ethical issues in doctoral supervision. The perspectives of Ph.D. students in the natural and behavioral sciences, in Ethics and Behavior 24(3), 195–214. https:// doi.org/ 10. 1080/ 10508 422. 2013. 830574.

Mahmoudi, M. (2019). Academic bullies leave no trace, in BioImpacts 9(3), 1–2. https:// doi. org/ 10. 15171/ bi. 2019. 17.

Martin B (1996). Status and envy in academia, in Campus Review 10, 23–29. https://www.bmartin.cc/pubs/96cr.html.

Martin, B. (2013). Countering supervisor exploitation. In Scholarly Publishing 45(1), 74–86. https:// doi. org/ 10. 3138/ jsp.45-1- 004.

Mathy, Liz (2022). Sexismus an der Universität Göttingen: Professor vor Gericht, in TAZ, 20.□1.□2022: https://taz.de/Sexismus-an-der-Universitaet-Goettingen/!5826013/ (last accessed: Apr 2023)

Nature PHD Survey (2019). Report by Elsie Lauchlan/Shift Learning: https://collegedoctoral.ubfc.fr/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2020/06/Nature_PhD_survey_2019_Report_v1_1.pdf

NDR Aktuell (30.03.2022): Göttingen. Uni-Professor bekommt elf Monate auf Bewährung: https://www.ndr.de/nachrichten/niedersachsen/braunschweig_harz_goettingen/Goettingen-Uni-Professor-bekommt-elf-Monate-auf-Bewaehrung,prozess7106.html (Last accessed June 2023).

Ohm, B. (2022). The Chair. A Short History of Structural Unfreedom, Anti-Democracy, and Disenfranchisement in German Academia, in A. Vatansever/A. Kölemen (eds.): Academic Freedom and Precarity in the Global North. Free as a Bird, London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003256984

Olsthoorn, L. H., Heckmann, L. A., Filippi, A., Vieira, R. M., Varanasi, R. S., Lasser, J., et al. (2020). PhDnet Report 2019. doi:10.17617/2.3243876.

Petit- Thorne, A. (2023). Sexual misconduct in academic liminal spaces. Autoethnographic reflections on complaint and institutional response, in Pritchard, E./A. Edwards (eds.): Sexual Misconduct in Academia Informing an Ethics of Care in the University, London: Routledge, 155-170. DOI: 10.4324/9781003289944-13.

Peukert, C., Jacobi, L., Geuer, J., Paredes Cisneros, I., Löffler, M., Lienig, T., Taylor, S., Gusic, M., Novakovic, N., Kuhl, T., Ordoni, E., Runge, A., Samoylow,

O., Härtel, M., Amend, A.-L., & Nagel, M. (2020). Survey Report 2019. Helmholtz Juniors. https://www.helmholtz.de/fileadmin/user_upload/06_jobs_talente/Helmholtz-Juniors/Survey_Report2019.pdf.

Pritchard, E. and A. Edwards (2023). Introduction, in Pritchard, E./A.Edwards (eds.): Sexual Misconduct in Academia Informing an Ethics of Care in the University, London: Routledge, 1-15. DOI: 10.4324/9781003289944-1

RTL News (30. März 2022). Hat er seine Macht missbraucht? Professor der Uni Göttingen hat Doktorandin mit einem Bambusstock geschlagen: https://www.rtl.de/cms/urteil-professor-der-uni-goettingen-hat-doktorandin-zur-strafe-mit-einem-bambusstock-geschlagen-4944916.html (last accessed: June 2023).

Satinsky, E. N., Kimura, T., Kiang, M. V., Abebe, R., Cunningham, S., Lee, H., Lin, X., Liu, C. H., Rudan, I., Sen, S., Tomlinson, M., Yaver, M., & Tsai, A. C. (2021). Systematic review and meta-analysis of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation among Ph.D.students. Scientific Reports, 11(1), 14370. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-93687-7

Schneider, L. (2020). Sexual violence during research. How the unpredictability of fieldwork and the right to risk collide with academic bureaucracy and expectations, in Critique of Anthropology. 40(2), 173–193. DOI: 10.1177/0308275X20917272.

Striebing, C., Schneider, S., & Schraudner, M. (2021). Die Verbreitung und Meldung Nichtwissenschaftlichen Fehlverhaltens in Forschungsorganisationen. Die größten Herausforderungen am Beispiel der Max-Planck-Gesellschaft. Beiträge zur Hochschulforschung, 1–2, 14–47.

Täuber, S. and M. Mahmoudi (2022). How bullying becomes a career tool. Nature

Human Behaviour 6(4), 475–475. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-022-01311-z

Thurmann, L. (2023). Predicaments of power. Trust- based sexualized violence in ethnographic fieldwork, in Pritchard, E./A. Edwards (eds.): Sexual Misconduct in Academia Informing an Ethics of Care in the University, London: Routledge, 83-98. DOI: 10.4324/9781003289944-8

Tirthankar, C. and A. Machurich (2020). Report on the Survey on the Prevalence of and Awareness about Sexual Harassment and Violence at Heidelberg University Campus: https://r.search.yahoo.com/_ylt=AwrkPMnNvHRkcdct86NfCwx.;_ylu=Y29sbwMEcG9zAzEEdnRpZAMEc2VjA3Ny/RV=2/RE=1685400910/RO=10/RU=https%3a%2f%2fwww.uni-heidelberg.de%2fmd%2fgsb%2fberatung%2freport_of_survey_on_sexual_harassment_and_assault-1.pdf/RK=2/RS=wa8_PDCe.FKIjEWBJaB1Zkupcrk-

Winkler, M (2023). Professor*innen gegen Machtmissbrauch an Universitäten , in: Zeitgeschichte-online, April 2023, URL: https://zeitgeschichte-online.de/themen/professorinnen-gegen-machtmissbrauch-universitaeten.

Woolston, C. (2020). Postdocs under pressure. ‘Can I even do this any more?’, in Nature 587(7835), 689–692. https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-020-03235-y

Woolston, C. (2022). Lab leaders wrestle with paucity of postdocs, in Nature. https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-022-02781-x.

Yamada, S., Cappadocia, M. C. and D. Pepler (2014). Workplace bullying in Canadian graduate psychology programs. Student perspectives of student–supervisor relationships, in Training and Education in Professional Psychology 8(1), 58–67. https://doi.org/10.1037/tep0000015.

Yoo, J. (2020). An Autoethnography of Mothering in the Academy. The Qualitative Report 25(8), 3173-3184. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol25/iss8/20.

Zawadzki, M. and T. Jensen (2020). Bullying and the neoliberal university. A co-authored autoethnography, in Management Learning 51(4), 398–413, hps://doi.org/10.1177/1350507620920532.

Julia Nina Baumann, *a psychological anthropologist, currently finishing her PhD at Freie Universität Berlin, Germany on emotional experience of ethnographers in their everyday academic lives. She has studied in Munich, Augsburg and Berlin and has ethnographically researched, taught, and published on various topics regarding STS, emotion/affect, mental health, migration/refugees, and power/hierarchy in Germany and abroad.*