##### Researcher

The first thing I wanted to ask was, obviously I’ve read your profile, I’ve read a bit about you, but just in your own words, could you tell me about yourself in terms of your background, career to date, and also your current role in the business school please?

##### Participant 58

So I basically did my undergraduate in business – I’m from [home country] and that is where I did my undergraduate – then I did my master’s degree in [foreign country] and I lived there for 5 years. And then I moved to the UK to do my PhD. It’s complex to speak about my career in a way because… I don’t know, I guess, I feel like in the UK your career starts after you’ve done the PhD in the UK, in a way. Whereas I worked very hard in an academic career before, I had worked as an academic, so I had a life before I came to the UK. I would say that I thought of basically doing stuff in the field of [management sub-discipline] and I’ve been studying [topic]. When I came to the UK, ever since, I’ve been specialising in [topic] and I see myself as an intersectional scholar now. So I finished my PhD in [year], and I had an interview and that was for my first job, I worked at [previous institution], which was a fixed term contract. And I was a teaching fellow. That was a very interesting period for me. I was treated immensely well in that place. I got my first publication whilst being a teaching fellow which is very unusual from what I understand now. They were very understanding. Usually as a teaching fellow you don’t have time for research, that was not the case there. And the person who hired me told me, before they advertised my post, they advertised for a lecturer, and the person they offered the job to didn’t take it. And so by the time they went back to the faculty, they were like no, you can hire a teaching fellow instead. And they felt like they were being punished for making a bad recruitment choice. The faculty said they didn’t want to go through that again and so they made this post, which was fixed term, and not a lecturer, but a teaching fellow. But I was still involved in research activities and so on, so it was pretty much, I felt that I was not disadvantaged from the perspective of being in a teaching position. Even though my reason for taking that post… I had applied for other jobs. You know, it’s really ridiculous in the UK, they ask you if you have teaching experience, which I had, but not in the UK. And it was very Eurocentric in that respect because everything I had done prior meant nothing. I remember I applied for several jobs and I would get called, I would get interviewed, and they would be like, we want someone with more experience. And I thought, what does that even mean? So I knew I needed to get teaching experience in the UK or I wasn’t going to progress here. So, they actually extended my contract. And when they were going to extend it again, the person who hired me, who became my sort of mentor there, said to me, it is not a good idea for you to stay in this job. It will affect you in your prospects for the future. And so I moved jobs. I applied for several jobs, I got several offers which was good, it probably boosted my self-esteem a little bit. And I took a job at [previous Russell group institution] and I stayed there for 5 years. And there I made some very close friends who I treasure and adore to this day, but as an institution, the university is good, the business school is bad. It might be that the university is a Russell group, but in my eyes, the business school is not. It is incredibly teaching focused in a way that is… like, there was a lot of paperwork. The reality is, I wanted to leave, especially because I was subjected to bullying there. It really affected me, to be honest. It affected my self-esteem. To the point where, when I wanted to apply for [current institution] I thought, why would they even want me? I felt so low. I moved to [current institution] and I had two options in a way, because I’d applied to [another university] and they offered me the job, but I decided to come to [current institution]. And the business school here, it is really massive. Almost unmanageable. You feel like you’re joining something that is like a wave that swallows you. It’s very bizarre, and I have mixed feelings about it. But what I do now is very interesting. You know how sometimes you apply for jobs that have a description, but the title doesn’t really align with that? I feel that is a little bit of what has happened to me, because I say to people, I’m a [role] now, but I’m not necessarily doing work in [subject area]. That is the tradition of the group, of being focused on [subject area], whereas I am more focused on [topics] and being an intersectional scholar. So it’s very weird. In terms of my role, I have several roles. I lecture in [topics], those are the main things I teach now. And at one point, somebody left, and there was a course on [subject] for a whole bunch of students that were not from the business school. And it was amazing, they had so much in their minds. They were more interesting than my actual students. Because they had different views. Some from engineering, etcetera. So I found that engagement interesting and thought provoking. Having a dialogue with some people who have very specific views about some of these things. But now I only teach those courses I mentioned. Mainly because I have different roles within the school. I’m a programme director for [programmes]. I enjoy it actually. I used to only teach undergraduate, and I loved it. I prefer undergrad to postgrad. Because in undergrad you see them early on and you see them later on, so you get a better sense of their intellectual development and you form a relationship. But for postgrad it’s rather artificial. I am also the associate head for [responsible management] within my division. I actually love that role a lot. Because it has to do with engagement that I enjoy. It’s different from the things I usually do generally. I am also involved in the [research institute] which is basically a merger of [previous research centres], and I’m a seminar convener for that.

##### Researcher

Great, I feel like I’ve got a really good grasp on your experience and working life. That’s really helpful. So, what was it that kind of inspired you to come over to the UK to do your PhD? Were you actively seeking to do it or was it an opportunity that arose at the time? How did that play out?

##### Participant 58

It was a complicated one, because it was not my plan to come to the UK. [Home country], because of it’s geographic location, it’s pretty much very US-centric. So you find a lot of people who do their PhD in the US. Before coming to the UK, and before any plans to come to the UK, I went to [foreign country] and the guy who supervised me for my master’s dissertation did his PhD in [UK institution], and I became his research assistant during my time there. Before I started teaching. Now we’re more like friends really. And he said to me that in the UK you can craft your own research and it would suit my intellectual vibe. He said I would enjoy it more and I would feel more independent and definitely like it better. And one thing led to another and I was kind of like, I went to [foreign country] to do my master’s but I really had no business staying there. The plan was always for me to go back home. But I didn’t. Because I started working in [foreign country], and kind of like started moving towards the possibility of coming to the UK to do my PhD. And I remember coming to the UK just to see things generally, and I met the woman who had been supporting my application and had helped me with my application for the PhD, which you don’t usually get the opportunity to do, especially if you’re an international student. So I felt really good. And I actually applied to some other universities here, and I got an offer from [another UK university], but they wanted me to shift the focus of my research. And that was non-negotiable for me. These people wanted to take my money but also tell me what to do. It was never going to happen, and I don’t regret it. And people were like if I were you, I would consider it because it is more prestigious. But I thought if I go there, I’m going to come away with a research profile that is based on something somebody else wanted me to do. I’d be creating their legacy, not mine. So, it was fundamental for me, I just couldn’t. And I also applied to [another UK university] and I got a letter basically saying, there is no research capability to supervise your topic. So basically nobody cared about my research. That was it. At [current and PhD institution] I remember I was back in [foreign country] when I got the offer, and I deferred my entry, because I was waiting for a scholarship. And that scholarship was delayed. I was supposed to start in the September, but I ended up coming in the January. And here there were several academics from the institute where I was based, and it was nice to meet people with whom I could have a dialogue. That’s important, because I was motivated when I came here, because I had that dialogue in that I had some ideas and people thought I could develop those ideas, but they weren’t intent on changing me or changing my intellectual freedom. And that mattered. And that was the main thing, so by the time I got the offer I was like, yeah, I’m going. And I still believe I got to craft my research in the way that I wanted. And that was pointed out to me, the guy who did his PhD in [UK institution] told me, it’s so mind blowing that you have the ability to take something and make something with it rather than be told.

##### Researcher

That’s really interesting, thank you for sharing that. So obviously you mentioned one of the previous business schools you worked at was bad, and you said that at your other previous place, you were treated immensely well… can you tell me a little bit more about what are the good and bad things of business schools?

##### Participant 58

Business schools are very artificial. I think they’re artificial because, generally, most people who are in business schools are not producing what you would call ground-breaking knowledge. Do you see what I mean? This is not a Covid-19 vaccine. It is a different type of knowledge I would say, a very practical… it tries to take the good and the bad of people and make sense of it in a way. And I remember one of the first things that I learnt was, it’s not what you know, it’s about who you know. If you know the editor of a journal then you’ve got a fair chance. And those sort of things I learnt pretty quickly. And if you don’t meet these people, things can be very difficult. And you can do all your teaching, you can be fantastic, you can be a good citizen – if you don’t publish then you’re not going to get anywhere. So it’s one of those things where I felt it was, I don’t know… that was a reality check in terms of, it is not about your intellectual worth so to speak. And I believed that was relevant, in terms of my work ethic and the value of my ideas were going to get me places, but they don’t. They don’t. And the reality is, people undermine you. I also think, one thing I’ll say is that the amount of bad stuff that happens in business schools is incredible. People are unkind. And I think we should just take things for what they are and be happy for other people. That is one of the things that I find complex and very negative about business schools. And this perception that we are so special… I don’t know whether you’ve seen this. I find a bit of a self-centeredness in business schools, we are not very grateful, and we generally think that we are changing the world. We don’t have a natural problem to solve. I don’t want to be like that. And this is why I have this sort of social justice orientation, because we need to really… the notion that we are helping these businesses, well, these people are rich and they don’t need our help. They don’t. We need to be more critical of that. The production of knowledge in business schools is problematic for me, and I don’t know… there was a point where I thought, is a business school really for me? I find more bad things than good things. With that said, I do think there is a movement of people that are trying to create more critical self-awareness and solidarity, and I’ve been trying to find those people and engage with them. Because I do think that that we can’t just assume that everyone is bad. And the reality is I think that we can create these communities, but we have to take the time and the effort to create them. They don’t just exist. And one of the things I find is, it is actually very undefined what business schools do outside of the mainstream. And I want to take that opportunity to be in a community with people that are perhaps quirky or interested in other forms of understanding business and subjects within business, and thinking differently about what we should be thinking about and problematizing. There’s also other issues… like how, this whole idea of how being a woman of colour, and also a migrant, has shaped some of my experiences in business schools. Business schools are very white. And in every place I have been I am the only non-white person in the immediate group that I belong to. At [previous institution], in the group, in the [management sub-discipline] department, as a member of staff I was the only non-European non-white person. At [previous Russell group institution] in the immediate group, again, I was the only non-European non-white person. At [current institution], now, after a hiring process, that I was actually a part of – and I think that played a role in terms of how diverse the shortlisting was – we are having a colleague who’s joining us as a permanent member of staff who is also from the global south. But I’ve spent the last 5 years being the only permanent member of staff here who is non-white and non-European in the immediate group. So that is quite isolating. I’ve had discussions with many people about things even like, I don’t know, the use of “BAME”, and disagreeing about its appropriateness. Those sorts of discussions are very draining and people don’t appreciate that, for someone who isn’t in a minority group, they have these discussions and move on, but for me it stays with me, because that is a discussion that undermines and delegitimises my experiences and the experiences of others like me. I have to reach out and find the people with who I can have a conversation with about this, because they’re not in the immediate vicinity. In all my years in academia, I’ve never had my PDR with someone who I can talk to about any of this stuff. What am I going to say to a white man, no matter how friendly he is? It’s very challenging from the perspective of how, in some ways, you are reminded that it is an exclusive club. And people don’t realise that. Maybe they don’t realise it because they don’t recognise their privilege. But one thing I will say is I don’t think this is specific to business schools. Even though it seems like business schools are the slowest ones to react to this. And in business schools it’s very hard to have these conversations that should be normalised. And everyone is treated like, oh, you should feel lucky that you’re here. You should be thankful. Because it’s a top institution. And I think, well, I recognise that it’s a top place, but the things that I bring here, you should be happy that I’m bringing them because other people are not. And other universities probably have more of this stuff, that this university doesn’t have. So, there’s a variety of things that I view as bad. But I think, because of the type of critique I have developed, I feel more strongly about it. You need colleagues – and this is one of the problems I guess – who understand you on a personal level. And it’s very hard to recognise that ultimately, they are still benefitting from a system they don’t question.

##### Researcher

Thank you for sharing that, that’s really interesting. I wanted to ask, you talked about your experiences of being a woman of colour and being a migrant… would you say that has played any part in your workload allocation, where you’ll be given time for research, teaching, certain responsibilities, and perhaps there is specific expectations for publications and teaching loads and things like that… has that played a part in those kind of decisions that are made for you, or with you with those in more leadership positions?

##### Participant 58

I think so. I think in very subtle ways. I think in very subtle ways, because for example… if I’m being honest, over the years I’ve learnt to also be, in the same way that I recognise instrumental behaviour in others as a way to navigate the system, I’ve always been quite instrumental myself. I’m not going to pretend like I’ve been some sort of puppet, you know? That’s not me really. Having said that, some things are very obvious to me as time goes by… just to give you a concrete example, some time ago I applied for [current role], and you know how it is. It’s like, well, people are applying at the same time, so you sort of look at their profiles to see what they have. And even at the time, I thought my profile is quite strong here. And a colleague came to see me, a senior colleague, and said you need to prepare for being knocked back. And I’m like yeah, but, you know, I think we all need to be prepared for that but I’m pretty confident that I have a case here. And at [current institution] when you’re applying for [current role], you need an internal colleague to support your application. And actually someone came to tell me, you should apply, I’ll support you. So, this wasn’t a case of me just trying to come back with a narrative about myself.

The support was there. And it turns out that senior colleague was supporting another colleague who got knocked back. And I’m like, well why did you come and tell me this? Why plant the seed of doubt that I may not get it? And I felt they were hinting at the fact that they thought this person who was knocked back was probably stronger. And I felt like they thought that because I had done stuff in [foreign country] and other places that they might consider as not holding value… and I am convinced that is where that was coming from. In terms of WAM things for example, I have felt that in a subtle way. Even in terms of at [previous institution], I did feel that the courses that they gave me were pretty much kind of like… I think they gave them to me, I don’t know whether to attribute it only to fact that no-one wanted to do them. Which would explain why you’d get a teaching fellow to do them. It wasn’t that much, I was doing, even as a teaching fellow there, less hours than a lot of people who teach at a more research-active university, so it’s a bit like, perhaps a bit of an unfair comment of sorts, but I felt like, they’re giving me all of these courses, and I took those courses and shaped them to my own interests. So I always take the opportunity shift things and align them with things I am comfortable with teaching, not just saying, oh, I’ve got to teach this and I’ve got to do this. I don’t just simply go with the fact that I’ve been put here and I have to do this or that. I do remember one thing, and I was very mindful of this. Someone told me they will always ask the women to do the caring jobs, which is programme director situations and things like that. And I will be honest with you, I took those roles instrumentally. When I was at [previous institution] I took them, I took a role as a director of a postgraduate diploma, for people who were professionals, it was fantastic actually, because I used to teach them and these people worked, so they didn’t come with this naivety of reading a book and trying to repeat it. Rather, it was a very intellectually challenging conversation because these people were on the ground doing work and using terminology in a different way to how it was explained in the classroom. So I really enjoyed that, so in that respect, probably, I don’t hold – and this is something I have found – I don’t hold learners to a lower standard intellectually, I don’t believe that. Because I think, well, those are the people who have the jobs that, if I go to the private sector, they might be the ones who are going to have to make that decision about whether to hire me or not. And not only because of that, but out of respect for where people are at in terms of what they know. And I don’t believe that us academics are all the way up here and everyone else is down there. It’s just not like that. And with this role I thought it would be helpful for my career, so they didn’t need to sell it to me, and I did it and it was fine. When I came to [previous Russell group university], because it was so focused on admin, blah blah blah, I took a role because it gave me such an amount of admin that it reduced my teaching immediately. And so it gave me time to work on other things. I even had time in [previous Russell group institution], with an admin role, to actually go for a [research council] grant. And I had time to do that because I was able to kind of like, in a way, all that rubbish about, “oh, those admin roles…”, I weaponized that to my advantage. Also at [previous Russell group institution], we had this [internationalisation programme] where several people from the UK from [highly-ranked universities], we were all taken to [foreign city] and we visited universities to make contacts and whatever. It was interesting but it wasn’t really what I was expecting. But, when that stuff was circulated, it was like, if anyone wants to go out… and someone approached me and said I think you should apply to this, and they used the phrase “your people”. I don’t speak [language], like how are those my people? Because they’re in [cultural region] and we’re close? I felt like this was very targeted to me as “one of them”. Do you see what I mean? Because the conversation went along those lines of, you know, “your people”, or “you will get along with them down there”. But at the same time it helped me. It did help me. I took it as an opportunity to visit [foreign city] where I’d never been. It was great, it wasn’t complicated. The only bad thing is that I really, really missed my family when I was there. I’m married, I missed my husband. I was like, I really cried like several nights, because I felt really lonely. And that was the first time I ever felt like that. It got to me at one point. But other than that, I tried to make the best of what it was. And I started to make choices when I was offered stuff. Here at [current institution] when I came, there was the opportunity to go to [foreign country] to do some teaching for some people there. And I was like, uh, no. Someone targeted me, they asked me, oh, would you like to go? It would be good. And I was like, well, I’m trying to focus on the portfolio I’ve got at the moment and I’m trying to strengthen the things that I’m doing, so this might not be the best opportunity for me right now. And that was the end of that conversation. And when I was at [previous Russell group university], one thing that I felt, that I never had the evidence for, but I felt that sometimes I was targeted to bring diversity to some of the discussions. Sometimes I felt like, why am I really here? It didn’t really fit in with anything that I had said I wanted to do. So I was part of all of these committees, and I mean, if you look at my CV, it’s a whole bunch of rubbish, all of these small committees. Having said that, what I have done, obviously, when I’ve written my narrative about my institutional commitment and citizenship, I say that I absolutely look for opportunities to collaborate with the institution, particularly around change processes. And that’s a good thing to have and I’m able to back it up with some rubbish someone gave me that I didn’t want to do but ultimately ended up doing. But I think that I have been targeted particularly because, well, in places that are highly homogenous and you have someone who is different, with the talk about diversity, it’s not new, it’s been going on for ages… it clearly fits in. And I’ve been, in a way, tokenized. In some cases, I’ll be honest, I have found it very difficult to say no in the interest of wanting my voice to be a part of some of those conversations. Some are menial things, but some have had, I’d say, the opportunity to make a difference, even if it sounds corny. To give you an example of that, recently, that process that I mentioned to you, where we were selecting someone to join our group in the business school, initially I wasn’t part of the panel, I wasn’t involved in any of that. But one day the head of group calls me and tells me that they received ambiguous instructions from HR that the panel was too white and that they needed to take someone out and put me in. And so I was like, are you serious? But then I took that as an opportunity to say, you know what, I’m going to… bring it on. Bring it on. Let’s do this. So I went there and took it seriously. And I realised during that shortlisting that I had been the only person who had really, really taken the time to read those CVs and look at things in detail. I made so many notes and by the time I got there to do the shortlisting, some people were saying stuff and I was like, that’s not what it says. So, you get to realise that, and I felt quite proud because I thought I’m actually being fair here, and that is very important to me. We need to, the process that we go through, you’re supposed to look at all of the CVs, look at the documentation that they’ve sent, and then we go to the shortlisting, look at all of those who’ve applied and say yes, no, or maybe, and start a process of elimination like that. And we get to those, however many there are, that we all agree are a yes. In one case, someone was about to be left out, on the grounds of something, and someone was about to be put in on the same grounds but having less than that other person, and I’m like but actually wait. It doesn’t make any sense. And so in that conversation I managed to make it obvious that they were making the wrong choice, and I’m thinking, surely these are people who have done this many times. I’ve done it for the second time and I’m thinking like, well, what is going on here? This is also the issue you have when people make certain assumptions about… and I remember people making comments in other situations like, I know the person who gave them the reference, and I’m thinking like, so? The fact that I know of some of these people doesn’t mean I’m going to make any choice based on that. We need to go with the criteria. But I’ve been gathering pieces of evidence anecdotally based on my interactions and it leads me to believe that there is an issue there in terms of how some decisions are made, some tokenizing is made, and some targeting is made about me. I told you my about my [responsible management] role, there are several associate head roles within the school, like associate head of teaching and learning, or associate head of research, etcetera. And these carry heavy WAM points. I remember when the associate head of teaching and learning came out, someone approached me, and I was like, I don’t think that role is for me. The only person who was honest with me was one guy who is a professor here who I hold to a very high regard, I see him as my mentor in a very random kind of way, because he’s really not my mentor but I trust him very much. Because I can have honest conversations with this guy and he’s genuinely very upfront. And I knew that. He told me, he said, I wouldn’t suggest that you take it. Because you are going to be able to do things more along the lines of what you enjoy, but also it’s more of an admin-driven role. And that’s what I did. I was surprised that someone targeted me for the teaching and learning role. Why? Why did someone get the impression that I would be so desperate to do a role that is so teaching and admin focused? The people who end up doing it ultimately say they haven’t had enough time to publish. Or work on other things. Because you’re tied up in paperwork and whatever. And in a way I also thought I have my plan to be able to say I’m doing teaching and learning stuff, because, for example, I recently sorted out the accreditation of our programmes that are [professional body] accredited, and I am the [professional body] lead so I have to do that. And so, I have my narrative, so this is where I was saying to you, in a way I’ve developed some idea of how to be instrumental about things. I feel that, proportionately, you see a lot of, let’s just say, a lot of women doing these roles.

##### Researcher

Thank you for sharing that. You mentioned briefly about your husband, you said that when you were in [foreign country] you missed him dearly, obviously he is a massive part of your life. And obviously just talking to you about your job it’s very obvious that you’ve kind of got an intense job, you do a lot of teaching, you have your research, your programme directorship, your [responsible management] role, a lot of stuff, your activism stuff going on as well. Loads and loads of bits and bobs that you’re doing. So I would say perhaps you do have quite an intense workload. How do you, do you feel like you maintain, based off of all of those things that you have to do, do you feel like you effectively maintain a good work-life balance? With your personal life, your family and that kind of stuff?

##### Participant 58

Not really, haha. No. Definitely not. And even now it’s quite evident to me. I find myself, for example, my husband made us a meal yesterday, and, it’s a little bit different, we don’t eat heavy food late at night, like the actual lunch is like the heavy meal, basically, so you need something light in the evening. But, he did the heavy meal, we were going to eat at one or something like that. I had meetings upon meetings upon meetings, and I ended up finishing at five. I had a meeting at five and so I had to speak to someone and say you know what, I haven’t eaten anything, can you give me 40 minutes? By that time obviously my husband had eaten, it would be unfair to ask him to wait for me. And I went to just reheat something and came back to Zoom to have that meeting. And I’m like, well, I feel like now I really spend my day in front of this. Whereas before I felt like I had more control of my time in a way. But academia generally makes you… I think academia sucks you in and it becomes like a family affair. I grew up in an academic household. My mother was a civil servant, my dad was an academic, and so the whole academic lifestyle was something I was quite familiar with. I remember seeing my dad exactly as I’m seeing myself now. And so I grew up with this kind of lifestyle in a way that was very… I’m able to see now because things have changed, conversations about work-life balance were not happening back then. If anything academics are often at home, but they’re at home doing stuff that is work-related and so… academia is never a 9 to 5 type of job. So you hardly ever disconnect. I feel I don’t. Sometimes I say to people, you know, I’m going to, I haven’t been able to do this, blah blah blah, so I will work on it over the weekend, and that’s a normal thing that I say. Actually someone asked me about this, how come you’re like you’ll work on it over the weekend, why didn’t you say next week? And I’m like well actually I work on things over the weekend, because that is how it works for me. At the same time, the notion of work-life balance is quite… I challenge that a little bit. It’s probably because I don’t have children and I don’t have caring responsibilities. I think if I did, like, my narrative would be different. But the level of flexibility, I recognise that as one of the things that is different. Probably one of the issues with academia is this way that we self-impose ways of working. Because no one forces you to, really, work at night. But I know a lot of people – I’m one of those – who work at night, writing papers, sometimes at night it helps me to think, or early on in the morning. Throughout the day it’s more challenging because you have meetings and you get interrupted and stuff. I think there’s an issue of the extent to which, when I think about it, my own approach works for me, but at the same time I wonder the extent to which I use it, I use the fact that it works for me as a justification not to look at it more carefully and say I need to separate… it’s just that I don’t separate my life… I told someone that it was so hard for me to separate my life as an academic from life, do you see what I mean? I feel that I am an academic 24/7, to the extent that there are things, for example, that I… publicly would not do, because I do think it’d be embarrassing for me, knowing that so many people know me. Let me give you an example. This is a random conversation I had with somebody about a colleague that got so drunk at a conference that they needed to be literally carried by two other colleagues. And I’m like, that’s a situation I would never put myself in. Because I just feel like… of course I want to celebrate and whatever, but I’m going to do that in my house if I have to because I do feel like there are, you know, I am supposed to… we all have personal lives, but there are things where you kind of like let yourself down and others down a little bit… and so I have a probably strong sense of moral conduct in relation to this. And so that also means that in the way I understand this work-life balance situation, it’s quite bizarre, just in the fact that one time when I was at [previous Russell group university] I bumped into a student at the supermarket. And the student asked me a question about an essay that I had assigned to them. I just felt like… I’m in the supermarket, we might as well, I can talk to them about whatever it is they want to talk about. That’s what I did. Sometimes I know some people are like, this is their personal time, but it’s not something that necessarily fits with me. I don’t know. It’s a question of probably personal choice. I don’t know if it’s personal choice or if I feel other pressures in relation to enacting the thing that I’ve decided that I am. So, it’s quite, I don’t know, I don’t have a clear answer.

##### Researcher

Excellent. Thank you for sharing that. A really interesting perspective on work-life balance. So, another thing that you spoke about was learning to say no to certain things. You mentioned about the opportunity to go and teach in [foreign country], you said no to that. The directorship for teaching and learning, you said no to going for that. And saw another opportunity that was more aligned to what you actually do as a researcher. Would you say that is kind of like a specific strategy you have adopted to navigate the academic environment that you’re in? Would you say you have any other kind of strategies or ways that you kind of think about how you’re going to progress in your career or manage the day-to-day workload on a strategic level where you think, right, this is what I’m going to do this week and I’m going to make these decisions, I’m going to prioritise X, Y, Z… I would just be interested to know if that is the case with you? Or if it’s more of a day by day, deal with things as they come kind of thing? I’d be interested to know.

##### Participant 58

I think at times… I think it’s just day by day sometimes, and then at some point you kind of like make a decision. I think it depends on what it is and things like that, because, for example, honestly, lately I have found that I’m working on a day by day basis because I have things that I’m way behind on and… I don’t know. For example, I made a decision one week, I’m going to write down everything I need, prioritise and do that… but by the time you do that, ten other things come up… and so it’s like, I don’t know, I feel like it’s quite difficult to, at least for me, and maybe that speaks to my inability to say no to some things, to be honest. Because it’s easy to say no when you have an alternative good explanation… do you see what I mean? When you have an alternative, when I say an alternative good explanation, you have an alternative thing that you’re doing, that you’re able to say, well actually, this is interesting but I’m already doing this. And that’s not necessarily the case. This is why I was able to say no to the teaching stuff, because I already had thought about the [responsible management role], like, I’m interested in that because blah blah blah. So I had a narrative that was very tight. And it didn’t sound like I was shying away from it, which is always a fear of mine, like, oh, people are going to think she doesn’t want to… do you know what I mean? I’ll be honest with you, I keep myself busy, in a way, in terms of particular roles, so that those kinds of requests don’t come my way. I also mentioned casually in conversation, oh, I’m doing this, and then I’m doing this and that… and if you look at my profile compared, for example, to other colleagues, I update mine frequently. Not just because I want people to know I’m not just sitting down waiting for stuff to happen, but also because I think people might be looking at it, what is so-and-so doing, and target people that way, in terms of, oh, maybe they look like they have time. If they don’t have access to your WAM, they might look at what you’re doing to see whether something might interest you. Does that make sense? And so, I don’t know, it works both ways. For example, I’ve received several invitations to speak about things, I’ve been a speaker, like a serial speaker, which is very helpful for me, [current institution] values that all for promotion purposes. And it helps me to spread my messages and have conversations that are interesting to me that are about things that I care about, things that I’m researching, things that I’m theorizing about. But I think on the back of having that info, having my profile so up-to-date with things that I’m doing, it’s very clear that there is particular things that I’m interested in. But admin-wise, I always kind of like mention, and I do, in meetings and things, I’m doing this, I’m doing that, because if you don’t, that’s when the things get to you. Literally. People will be like, oh, would you do this? And those are strategies that I… I don’t know whether they work, but I feel they have worked for me, to be very honest, that’s how I feel. Because, I don’t know, I’m still convinced that there is an expectation that particular people will do certain things. And in that, particular people are normally women and women of colour, there’s always, always a target of, you know, doing menial stuff like caring work and stuff like that. Always.

##### Researcher

That’s really interesting. Thank you. So I sort of have one more question I kind of want to ask, which is sort of based around everything we’ve spoken about. You’ve kind of identified a lot of, I guess, critiques of business schools and, you know, there is definitely room for improvement in a lot of areas, I think, in terms of, you know, the way that work is given out and the kind of general balance of things and that kind of stuff. I just want to ask from your perspective, of someone who is been in that environment now for some time, what is your kind of idea of what actually needs to change or happen to kind of fix some of those problems? Obviously, you know, a lot of things can’t be fixed overnight and it needs, I guess, a gradual process of some kind to kind of help things improve. But I’m just wondering, yeah, from your perspective, what do you think are the main things that could change or happen, and how would they actually go about changing? You know, where does that come from? Is it like a top-down kind of thing? Could there be some bottom-up processes as well? I’d just be interested to know if there’s any particular things that are on the top of your mind that you could think of in that sense.

##### Participant 58

I think the first thing would be to recognise that there are problems. Even critiques about the business school are primarily critiques about things that effect dominant groups, rather than other groups. And also, making the problem… or homogenizing the problem does not address the fact that some of us are experiencing the double burn of experiencing those problems and the marginalisation that we experience in business schools. So I do think there are two levels here. One is the issue of addressing problems that effect the business school as a whole, you know, and all these things are actually, you know, it’s ridiculous to think that we can be good at everything. They expect so much, but ultimately, what gets you the promotion, what gets you the other job, what gets you everything is those publications. And they don’t involve any teaching and learning, in a way, there might be publications about teaching and learning but generally they don’t. And so in a way the system puts you in a position where you have to, you know, play that game. You can play the game on your own terms sometimes, but it gets very exhausting. And I think the conversation on the one hand needs to happen, recognising what the problems are at different levels. That’s one thing that I don’t know what the solution is because it cannot start from the top, because anything that starts from the top would be solving the problem to the extent that it doesn’t jeopardise the status quo. So it’s really not solving the problem. It’s doing a little bit that’s still maintaining the power structures that exist. So that’s more of a bottom-up, and it needs to start with some radical transformation, how that would happen, I really don’t think it will. Because the whole structure of the business school is predicated on the principle of that level of marginalisation of particular groups. Even knowledge presents that narrative of heroic, you know, multinationals exploiting people in the global south for example. The other issue has to do with how in the business school there’s increasing gamification of everything, anything and everything you can imagine, becomes a game, becomes a target or something you need to improve. And so that makes life, you know, instrumental in a way. And the activist work that I do, loads of times I’m asked at the business school, oh, can you talk about this? And I find a way not to talk about it, because I’m like, why am I going to subject myself to speaking about things that they just want as a tick box exercise when I actually wish we could do things to change things. But I don’t think they’re interested in changing, they’re just ticking their box. So this perception of leading dual lives is how I see myself in relation to that. Because I do a lot of things, for example, with the [alliance] and colleagues from there, but most of those things are not in direct… they do not necessarily involve [current institution] because I genuinely think they wouldn’t care. Why would they? Do you think I am going to come and change all of that? How many structures and how many white people are benefitting and have benefitted historically from it? I attended a meeting, more than a meeting, it was like the school board, so everyone in the school is invited. And someone, I think the chair of the EDI committee, mentioned about the increasing challenge of addressing the underrepresentation of people from ethnic minorities in particular roles. And the director of the school said well actually, it’s not just about race, because I as a mother of small children… and I’m like, you’re a white woman, with a six figure salary, calm down. Do you see what I mean? So this thing that people engage with, to kind of say, oh, poor me… well actually, I’m not saying poor me, but they treat me like “poor me”. Because even in the way you see, like, I was telling someone, I was telling someone about an experience that I had with a colleague who told me that he had been approached – this was someone who recently got [role], so after I got my [role], he got his [role] – in the space of two years he went from [less senior role] to [role] on the back of taking an admin role. I had always thought that that’s not really… do you see what I mean? And I’m not comparing myself, but it really, really annoyed me a little bit because I thought like, well, here’s this guy who was tapped on the shoulder by a professor saying oh, you should consider your next promotion. And I did say to someone, several people have said I don’t get those taps on the shoulder. I got that tap on the shoulder from a colleague who told me you should apply, you know, because it was so evident, I think that at this point, even now, when I, I remember the last time I was promoted I attended a conference and I met someone from a different university and she was like how are you? And I was like oh, great, and she was like has anything good happened? And I was like, well actually, last week I was promoted and she was like, oh, you’re a [more senior role] now? And I was like no, I’m a [role], and she told me like, really? And this is someone who has done recruitment where, she’s even at a Russell group, and so I said to her well actually there’s probably other factors that come into play. But the issues that I still think that… because some of the stuff that I do, regardless of how important I see it as being, it’s not mainstream, it doesn’t really fit with that narrative and so that’s one of the issues that I find that needs to be addressed in the business school. But there’s a single narrative about what a successful academic is. And that successful narrative doesn’t include people like me for example. And so that’s, I don’t know how to address that to be very honest with you, because I don’t think that’s going to change. I’m very cynical about any initiative, like, “yeah, we want to decolonize the business school” – they don’t want to do any of that. They don’t even address the basics which is inclusion and diversity. Are they going to decolonize now? It’s ridiculous. And so in terms of, I see the two problems are something effecting the whole of the business school and something effecting minoritized groups. Because I’m a minoritized group and I see that my struggles are very distinct to the struggles of colleagues who are in the majority, the dominant groups. In my time at [current institution] I’ve only had one PhD student where I was the second supervisor. And I look around me at all the other colleagues and between themselves its like a little mafia. Because they do have more than one, and I’m like, well that’s very surprising because I’ve seen people supervise students in areas where I have expertise and they don’t. The question is why are they coming together as a little group? So the outlier is me but I don’t think I’ve done anything to be the outlier. I’ve been, in a way, positioned as the outlier from the outset. So that level of otherness is quite evident to me. And I know other people have experienced it because we’ve talked about it. In other institutions. This idea of like how you are interpreted as not being part of the dominant narrative. And so it’s less problematic to find someone like themselves with whom they can have their little conversations, than having to have a conversation with me, which is going to be more challenging. Because I’m not necessarily going to agree. Why? Do you see what I mean? And they see themselves as having like the little group, and… so, I don’t see a solution for that. I don’t see a solution for that because the university claims to be interested in diversity when it’s very slow to react to it. Hiring is one single example. Student body is also another example, because we don’t have, if you go to [current institution], in particular, at least in the business school I always ask the question, where are the local students? So clearly, all the students at [current institution], unless they reach [current institution] through the, I don’t know, that programme that aims to reach out, outreach, whatever it is… how do you ever make it to [current institution]? It’s a very elite place and a very white place. I’ve took courses where I am the only non-white person in the room, and I’ve took courses where there’s one or two students of colour. That speaks to me about an environment that is very particular in the way in which it makes people either, in the way in which it selects or it makes people self-select. I don’t think [current institution] is unique, though, to that. Because you see it everywhere. Well, you don’t see it in universities perhaps in London, because it’s much more multicultural, I would say, their student body, in many universities in London. But [previous Russell group institution] was very white, [current institution] certainly is. The places that I know, [previous institution] was very white as well, and so it’s quite an environment that makes it very hard particularly for certain groups to feel like they could see a change or they can lead a change or they can be part of it.

##### Researcher

That’s really interesting. Thank you so much for sharing that. There’s a lot of important things, things for me to think about as well. I’ve got so many notes, haha.

##### Participant 58

Well, I hope that’s useful.

##### Researcher

Oh, extremely useful, thank you. So I said that was my last question and we’ve covered everything I wanted to talk about so in terms of direct questioning I don’t think there’s anything else I wanted to ask, so I’ll just say if there’s anything else you can think of that you think might be, you know, relevant to me and what I’m looking at or the things that we’ve talked about, something that you haven’t really had a chance to speak about that you think I perhaps should’ve asked about or anything like that, that you think might be relevant to the business school environment or anything like that at all? Obviously you don’t have to, but just if you have any kind of final thoughts about anything at all?

##### Participant 58

Not that I can think of. I think I said my piece, really, pretty much. Yeah.

##### Researcher

Yeah, haha. Definitely, definitely, Oh, well that’s wonderful, well in that case, I will stop recording.