

The Bold and The Backlash: When Marginalised Voices are Heard in Neoliberal Land

Marg Rogers^{a*}, Margaret Sims^b, Wendy Boyd^c

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^a **Corresponding Author:** Marg Rogers, University of New England, Armidale NSW, Australia.
E-mail: mbaber@une.edu.au
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8407-7256>

^b Margaret Sims, Macquarie University, Sydney NSW, Australia.
E-mail: margaret.sims@mq.edu.au
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4686-4245>

^c Wendy Boyd, Southern Cross University, Lismore, NSW, Australia.
E-mail: wendy.boyd@scu.edu.au
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5435-6617>

Abstract

The hierarchy in our educational institutions and services often mirror societal attitudes towards power and whose voices are privileged or ignored. Historically, those with power feel uncomfortable when marginalised voices are heard. There is a lot at stake when power is threatened and new voices demand changes within society. This discussion paper explores various instances of where that has happened and the backlash faced by those who are given a chance for their opinions to be heard or those who assist them to voice their narrative through research and reporting. Using publicly available data and our own experiences, we examine incidences where society has listened to children, the victims of sexual abuse in institutions and Indigenous Australians. For people to reach their potential, their voices need to be heard in matters that affect them, according to the United Nations Human Rights Declaration (United Nations, 1948). Using discourse and narrative analysis, the authors discuss the cost of exercising those rights within a neoliberal context and examine how this influences peoples' agency as they face media backlash, online trolling and death threats. Despite this, when marginalised people are bold enough and are allowed to tell their stories, societies, educational institutions, and services have the chance to adapt and improve. This will interest those who educate and research with marginalised people or who study social and institutionalised power.

Keywords:

Neoliberalism, Agency, Indigenous Voice, Children's Agency, Sexual Abuse, Human Rights, Climate Change Activism

Introduction

Educational institutions often mirror the power structures found in society, with favour and opportunities to be heard available to those who hold power. Those with power in society can maintain power only if they can control those with less power. Control can be exerted physically, economically, socially, culturally, emotionally, verbally, and in other ways. This paper explores social, verbal and economic methods of control through silencing of voices of those who are marginalised. If marginalised groups do speak out, or others speak for them, there is a consequence for breaking that silence. Despite United Nations writing the Human Rights Framework in 1948 (United Nations, 2020), this



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paper argues that such ideals cannot be fully realised within a highly controlled neoliberal context such as exists in Australia and many other Western nations. To examine this issue, we first outline the neoliberal context, the Human Rights Framework (United Nations, 2020), the silencing methods, and then explore three groups of marginalised people. We examine instances where children, victims of childhood sexual abuse, and Indigenous communities have been bold enough to speak out or had others speak out for them and the backlash this speaking out has caused. We explore the ramifications for those who teach, research and work with marginalised groups and how we might move forward as a society.

Neoliberal context

The economic context in which most Western countries operate is neoliberal, which frowns upon state responsibility, intervention and safeguards within the economy (Monbiot, 2017). Neoliberalism rose to prominence after the Great Depression, when the previous economic model, Cambrianism, appeared to be failing (Monbiot, 2019). Neoliberalism relies upon the privatisation of services, deregulation of markets, free-market capitalism and the rise in power of the economy to drive society forward through consumerism and the idolised entrepreneur (Chomsky, 1999; Chomsky, 2016; Monbiot, 2019). Neoliberalism encourages consumerism and competition, seeing these as the drivers of progress within society, ignoring human tendency for altruism and the way societies can improve outcomes by working together (Monbiot, 2019; Chomsky, 1999). The ideal neoliberal citizen is willing to conform to standardised expectations, aiming to earn a sufficient income through this conformity to consume and be independent of others (Azevedo and Jost, 2019).

Birch (2015: 576) claims "neoliberalism is a hegemonic ideology tied to the restoration of class power ... [a] social order in which the capitalist class allied with the managerial class to restore elite incomes through financialisation and the disciplining of workers." Under the neoliberal framework, managerialism and control flourishes, and managers become highly prized and rewarded with inflated salaries (Rogers, et al., 2020; Sims, 2020). Managerialism is justified by the belief that standardisation and compliance are essential for an organisation to stay competitive and to control the quality of the end product or service (Rogers, 2021; Rogers, Dovigo & Doan, 2020).

Despite the economic nature of neoliberalism doctrine, it has been applied quite clumsily to other areas of our lives, such as healthcare, social work and education (Macías, 2015; Moloney et al., 2019). Indeed, it is still unfolding in our lives, creeping in to control the role of academics and journalists as they critique the actions of the powerful within society

(Doran, 2019; Sims, 2020). Thus, neoliberalism "may be seen as a ubiquitous, totalising, and epoch-defining phenomenon" (Bettache and Chiu, 2019: 9), and even "the new common sense" (Carlen, 2018: 25). It has become so ubiquitous that some perceive it as a theory of everything (Rowlands and Rawolle, 2013).

Under the neoliberal model, the powerful have much to lose if members of society without power start to question and undermine their authority, the status quo and the very model that has made them flourish (Graeber, 2019). As an economic model, neoliberalism creates a vast divide between the rich and the poor and then blames the poor and marginalised for their inadequacies (Monbiot, 2019). Oppressed people are positioned by neoliberal thought as the authors of their misfortunes; structural inequities are not recognised, so that lack of success is solely attributed to individual failure (Hartwich and Becker, 2019). Given this positioning as failures, the voices of people who are thus marginalised are not valued, and the messages they wish to communicate are not given credibility. Only the powerful convey messages that are worth hearing. In our neoliberal world, the messages of importance come from those with status, and it is these messages that have the power to shape our world. Silencing of marginalised voices is thus a key feature of neoliberal ideology, and the rights of those who are marginalised to be heard are overlooked. This paper explores what happens when these marginalised voices are heard and why they need to be heard as people exercise their human rights.

Human Rights Framework

Historically, there have been many instances where people lacked the power to be heard in Western countries. In feudal times, for example, the general population did not have the right to be heard. Those with wealth, power and education used many methods to quieten those who spoke out or questioned authority. During various times since then, the amount of freedom the general population have has seen many reforms. Freedom of speech has also fluctuated depending on who was in power. However, the Universal Declaration for Human Rights was proclaimed in Paris in 1948, soon after the end of World War II. The Declaration was considered a milestone in human rights' history for achievements to be obtained for all people across the world (United Nations, 2020). The declaration is comprised of 30 Articles, and two articles relevant to the framing of this paper are Article 19 and Article 29:

Article 19. Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 29 1. Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible. (duties may include speaking up when there is injustice or a need for action).

The nine vignettes presented in this paper include people who have asserted their rights that align with these two Articles. All people are deemed by the UN Human Rights Declaration to have the right to speak their opinion without interference. But how are they heard and listened to? How does the general population respond, and in what way do people in power and the media respond? For people who speak up when injustice has been perceived, how are they heard? And what is the response to their voices? The following nine vignettes present the voices of people who have spoken up, expressed their opinion, and experienced backlash. Is backlash a violation of rights, and does the acceptance of this backlash signify a cultural shift towards totalitarianism?

This issue is highlighted on occasions when a person expresses their opinion and is consequently vilified by others. This vilification could be perceived as a breach of Articles 5 and 12 of the UN Declaration for Human Rights:

*Article 5.
No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.*

*Article 12.
No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.*

This paper argues that the vilification currently evident in academia and the public domain represents a shift in the common understanding of the Declaration for Human Rights (United Nations, 1948). This shift, we argue, increasingly creates a context where 'right' and 'proper' messages are considered socially acceptable, but those deviating from what is 'right' and 'proper' are viewed as needing to be stifled, and those voicing these messages need to be corrected, or addressed, to maintain the status quo. In our increasingly neoliberal world (Sims, 2020, p. 71), argues "Ever growing compliance demands and ever-decreasing agency associated with the growing punitive audit culture" works to silence voices and ensure that only the standardised, acceptable messages are heard. While the authors of the Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 2020) wrote the articles as ideals, we argue that these cannot be achieved under a neoliberal framework. It is important for countries to check that these rights are fully realised (Jackson & Allan, 2010). To assist with this, we will first present nine vignettes to illustrate the operation of this silencing then proceed to synthesise our argument in the discussion. The vignettes use two different styles, one that ties together various media

quotes for the voices of children and victims of child sexual abuse and a narrative style for the Indigenous voices due to the different anecdotal data.

Silencing

Not being heard and/or responded to respectfully when someone speaks up about an issue that affects them has been recognised as 'silencing'. Emerick (2019) argues that silencing prevents someone from communicating and is viewed as a violation of integrity, and can challenge people's beliefs. When people with power respond to those recognised as not having power, such as children, it is a response that could be interpreted as viewing children as 'not-yet citizens' (Canosa, 2016). Such actions are socially unjust and represent the notion that speaking up is an unpopular action that is frequently followed by reprisals (Wiggan, 2019).

Voices from the margins can inform public opinion in such cases and bring issues that have been long suppressed to the fore (Wiggan, 2019). Speaking out for social justice is viewed as being in the common interest advocating for the common good (Griffiths, 1998 in Bradley, 2007). In 2017 there were raids in the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) journal offices and two other media offices by the Australian Federal Police (ABC, 2019). The media groups united to demand justice for the journalists as the ABC Managing Director explained: "No-one deserves to be punished for doing their job and pursuing information that is clearly in the public interest" (p. 1). This incident has raised debate about who then decides what is for the common good? Usually, such decisions are made by those in power, and those in power make decisions that significantly influence people's lives (Bradley, 2007). However, the following nine vignettes bring questions to this view.

Conceptual Framing

The conceptual framing of this paper is illustrated in Figure 1. We argue that the neoliberal context in which we live creates an expectation of conformity to which those in marginalised groups do not meet. As a consequence, the voices of people who are marginalised are not respected and are often silenced. Where they are heard, the messages they share are not attributed any importance. Children are one such group considered as marginalised. Millei and Kaffei (2018) identify that children learn about right and wrong and how to act in challenging situations as a result of how those around them respond. Thus, when marginalised voices speak out, the neoliberal reaction is either to shame the speaker, the message or both. Speaking out requires acts of courage which may sometimes be rewarded when words are heard, and community understandings may change as a consequence. More often, such acts of courage are

not rewarded, and the speakers are reviled, made fun of, or generally disregarded. We argue that speaking out is important because of the potential to change community attitudes and values. Along with the potential to change the way we see and act in the world, listening to marginalised voices honours the Declaration on Human Rights (United Nations, 1948). All voices have the right to be heard. Neoliberal silencing is a form of behaviour that does not respect this declaration. In the following section of this paper, we share examples of silencing and speaking out that illustrate the operation of our conceptual framework.

Methodology

The first two topics explored in this paper, children's voices and the voices of victims of child sexual abuse, came together through the authors' discussions about similar themes they represented. The third theme, about the voices of Indigenous Australians, emerged from the discussions about how these themes had impacted one author's work. As we reflected on substantial similarities, the authors decided to delve further into the topics using a combination of discourse analysis (for the first theme about children's voices) and narrative analysis for the second two themes. Discourse analysis is often used to 'answer questions about social relations, such as dominance and oppression' (Johnstone, 2018, p. 6). Narrative research explores the stories of people (Polkinghorne,

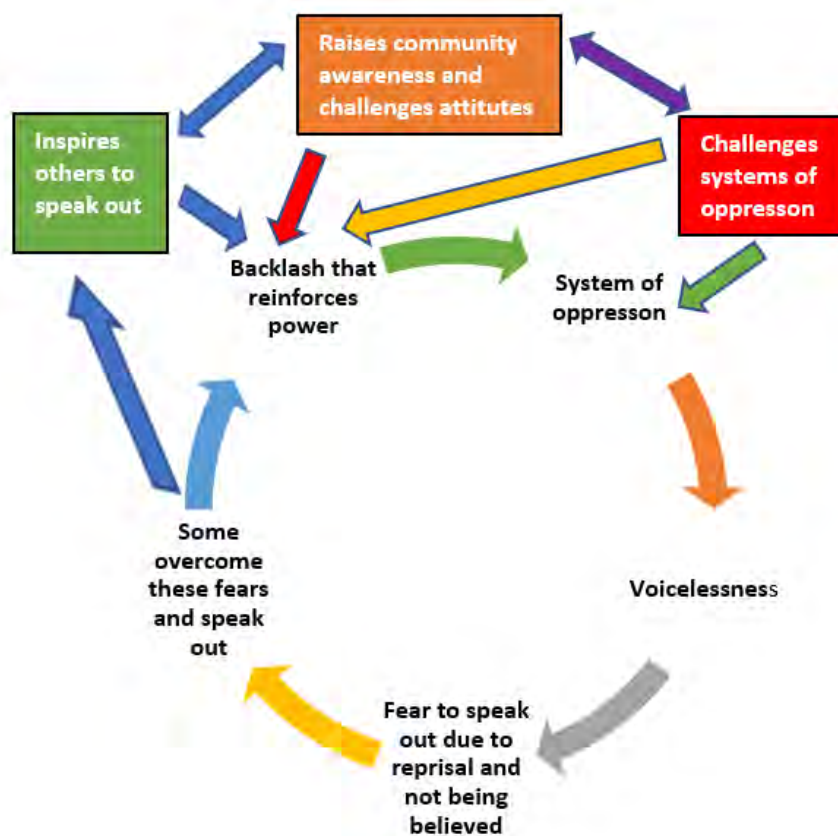
2007), focussing on the meaning behind the stories. The meaning created by narrative brings together humans' experiences and behaviours (Polkinghorne, 1986) and how they relate to each other and other living things. These themes were then analysed within the neoliberal context of Australian society and the Declaration of Human Rights (1948) to provide a better understanding that would enhance the overarching theme of the paper. This has been summarised in Figure 2.

The paper relies on publicly available data and narrative reflections, so it does not require ethics approval. However, the authors must act ethically. To do that, they have not revealed the identity of any characters in the narrative reflections, other than the author themselves.

The voices of children

The world has witnessed marginalised groups being heard, and what has been the response? Greta Thunberg, when she was 15 years old, appeared on television/social media striking from going to school, outside the Houses of parliament in Sweden, protesting for action to be taken on climate change. Her message was clear: world leaders need to take action on climate change to protect the Earth. As a result of her actions, students from around the world began to take action, and to join Greta in her campaign to bring

Figure 1
Conceptual framework



about change. The western world witnessed mass strikes by school students under the banner of Fridays for the Future: FFF. Greta explained to British MPs that the lack of action on climate change was ‘ongoing irresponsible behaviour’ and ‘the greatest failure of humankind’ (Australian Broadcasting Commission [ABC] News, 2019, August, 2). The vignettes for this section can be found in Vignettes 1-3 in the appendix.

How did the world leaders of countries respond to Greta Thunberg? Vignette 2 illustrates Greta’s influence and the insulting comments made by world leaders on her actions. These comments were made by powerful men who criticised Greta for being angry, stating she was mentally disturbed and she should be in school learning. Claims were made that she was creating needless anxiety, and she should not be politicising and advocating for the environment. Such comments go against the intentions contained in Articles 5 and 12 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights; that there not be degrading comments made, nor should there be attacks on a person’s honour or reputation. Yet it seems that these world leaders were angered by her actions and thought it acceptable to publicly act counter to her human rights. While Greta has been criticised, others have turned her into a hero, yet also a villain, as she challenges the rights of countries to forgo action on climate change to support their economic growth. An analysis of Greta’s actions, which was arousing worldwide action on climate change by students, were identified by Barry (Media Watch, 2019) as making a difference which was why leaders were angered. Greta has held firm to linking her actions

to climate science despite ongoing criticisms of her actions. She continues to assert that action is needed to be taken now to preserve the world for the future.

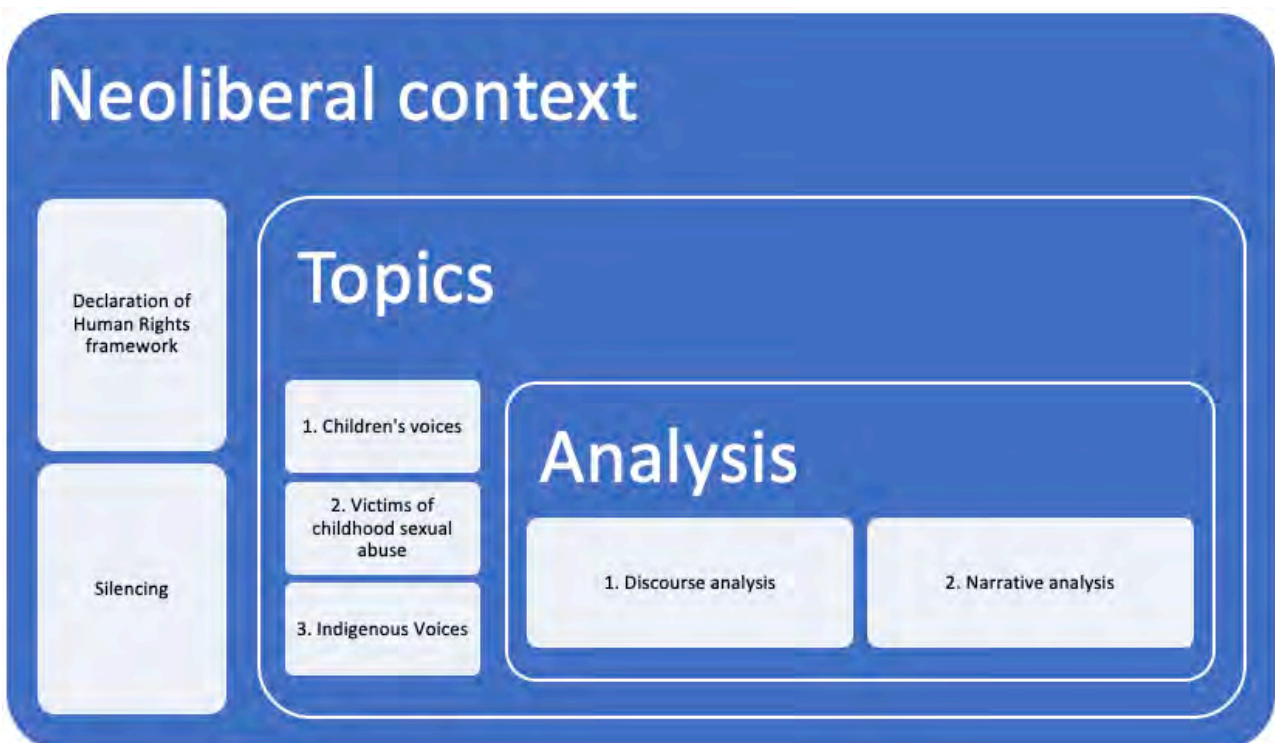
Vignette 3 highlights the dismissal of children’s voices by the media and politicians- people with power. When four-year-old preschool children expressed the view that the Aboriginal Flag should fly on the Sydney Harbour Bridge along with the Australian flag, they were met with belittling comments: they were not old enough to express such ideas, and that they have been manipulated and ‘politicised’ by their teachers. Such comments attack children’s rights to speak out, and the children’s reputation was not honoured (Article 12). Children in this Vignette were portrayed as being incapable and incompetent when it comes to speaking out on such an issue. Yet the Early Years Learning Framework (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009), mandated for use in early childhood settings throughout Australia, recognises children as capable and competent:

They (children) recognise their agency, capacity to initiate and lead learning, and their rights to participate in decisions that affect them, including their learning (p.10).

with Learning Outcome 2.1 starting that early childhood educators should support:

Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation (p.29).

Figure 2
Context, framework, topics and analysis



The Education Minister was cited as saying that children should not be engaging in such acts but should be playing (Daily Mail, 2019, October 23). Yes, children do learn most effectively through play, and they also learn that they can actively participate in supporting the rights of people. But children need to be heard, as Craig Reucassel (2020) highlighted when watching a climate change protest:

"...it doesn't feel like we are doing enough to see them get out here- they feel useless...and they're going to be the ones dealing with this. It's going to be the kids."

The voices of adults who were sexually abused as children in Australian institutions

Another marginalised group in Australia whose voices are often silenced are those who have allegedly suffered sexual abuse as children within our institutions. Vignettes 4-6 in the appendix provide examples of the media coverage of this issue.

Children are arguably one of the most powerless groups in our society. One of the problems with institutions is that they render children particularly vulnerable (Munro and Fish, 2015), and vulnerability is one of the areas studied in victimology. Burgess, Regehr & Roberts (2011) explain that victimology is the study of the victim, the offender and how this sits within society. Some of the major theories and critiques of victimology are listed in Table 1, along with the way 'Bernie' as an alleged victim within the vignettes aligns within these theories and ideas both as a child and adult. One of the challenges for victims of child sexual abuse, as shown in Vignette 4, is the difficulty of reporting. Fears that they would not be believed against the word of a more powerful adult are common. In Vignette 5, the accused is also someone who carries the authority of his position within the church and the broader community in which he lived. Thus he is able to use the 'cultural and community factors', including power positions (Burgess et. al., 2011). This is exacerbated because victims are reporting something personal and related to their body and sexual acts, so they feel a sense of embarrassment and guilt, that they may have somehow done something wrong, rather than been the victim of abuse from a more powerful person. Other barriers to speaking up are in our legal institutions that have been established to deal with adults giving evidence about recent events rather than historical events they experienced as a child. The nature of sexual abuse means that some of the episodes might have occurred in private, so witnesses may not be available. Acknowledging this, it is now recommended that children and other vulnerable witnesses should be assisted by the use of video interviews conducted by someone with suitable training (Commonwealth of Australia, 2020). This alone does not deal with the many barriers for victims to speak up, as shown in Table 1.

Despite this, there has been an increase of complaints against abusers in many of our institutions, including state, Catholic and independent schools, foster care homes, orphanages, extra-curricular organisations, cultural organisations and faith groups. It is important to note that Vignettes 4-6 represent one church in the interests of brevity. However, there are multiple examples from most faith groups, as indicated in the Report from the Royal Commission into the Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Commonwealth of Australia, 2020). This paper is not commenting on the guilt or innocence of the accused, but rather the role of power and the difficulty facing children to speak up when they are abused or at a later time in their life when they are re-victimised. Dr Viv Waller talks about the courage these victims needed to report these issues to the authorities. It is important to note that historically, victims sometimes reported the abuse to their parents, only to have the church leaders brush the matter aside, silence them, or organise for the abuser to be moved on to another parish or country. Such abuse of power serves to further squash complaints, as victims see the pain of reporting as futile, recognised in Dr Waller's comments and even Cardinal Pell's in Vignette 6. Archbishop Coleridge gives a very graphic picture of the institution's power when he comments on its 'dark and destructive' nature (Fulton, 2020). The unravelling of the extent of the abuse and the cover-ups within the church have left some church leaders, and parishioners surprised and left to deal with the loss of trust, as shown in Father Eric Bryant's comments.

When victims do report, they also face the possible backlash through social and traditional media, the institution and members of the community. This prevents victims from coming forward, or when they do, they ask to remain anonymous, such as the case of Witness J, who didn't want the case to define him and wanted to protect his family. Those who try to give the victims agency, such as the police or some sections of the media, are accused of incompetence, witch hunting and using vulnerable people, as shown in the comments of Andrew Bolt and Cardinal Pell in Vignette 6. Indeed, the institution's leader, Pope Francis labelled those who accuse the church as being connected with the Devil. Burgess et. al. (2011) describe this as victim-blaming, where victims' actions are seen as directly causing someone to commit criminal acts or are blaming others for something they have done. Conversely, Munro and Fish (2015: 37) state that 'A shared acknowledgement of how difficult it can be to detect and respond effectively to abuse contributes to a culture that keeps the issue high on the agenda'. The Royal Commission has published several recommendations for particular institutions to ensure abuse is prevented and victims' voices are heard. This positive step also needs to be mirrored in our legal institutions so that the process is less harrowing for victims. Perhaps there also needs to

Table 1

Theories and ideas of victimisation and victimology

Theories and ideas of victimisation and victimology	Bernie as an alleged child victim of sexual abuse	Bernie as an adult victim of silencing (structural revictimisation)
Victim precipitation (passively behaviours that may make crime easier)	Being compliant within the institution's rules Recognising power structures Wanting adult attention because he was an orphan	Being compliant within societies rules Avoiding revictimisation by not testifying in court Recognising power structures No family support Mental health issues
Lifestyles (situational factors that make crime more likely)	Orphan in an institution	No family support
Routine activities (activities/situations Bernie was involved in that made him more vulnerable)	In an institution with motivated offenders Lack of a capable guardian (orphan and his guardian became the alleged offender) Bernie was a suitable target (he was compliant and respectful to adults in the institution)	Some media and church leaders (motivated silencers) Lack of capable guardian (police and justice system unable to make the system 'safe' for Bernie to speak out) Bernie was a suitable target (thinking he would not be believed as an orphan, nor an ideal victim [Christie, 1986] because he knew the offender)
Victim proneness	Young, minority (orphan), lonesome (von Hentig, 1948)	Blocked, lonesome, broken hearted (von Hentig, 1948)
Opponents of positivist theories	Poverty and vulnerability in institutional care, victim-offender relationship (Bernie trusted and admired the alleged offender, ignorant to grooming behaviour, sexually innocent [Brookman, 2005])	Victim blaming (some media and through revictimisation in the justice system [Amir, 1971])
Critical victimology	Structural (Bernie's poverty placed him at higher risk [Mawby & Walklate, 1994])	State power (have the power to apply or deny the label of 'victim' through the court system)
Denial of victim status	Powerless more likely to be victims but less likely to be given victim status (Bernie didn't think he would be believed)	Hierarchy of victim status (Bernie believing he would not be believed because he was from an orphanage)

be some guidelines and training for journalists around victimology and re-victimisation for victims and alleged victims of child sexual abuse.

The voices of Indigenous Australians and the powerless

Another marginalised group in Australia whose voices are often silenced are our Indigenous community, as demonstrated in Vignettes 7 to 9 in the appendix.

Vignettes 7, 8 and 9 provide examples of silencing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander points of view. This silencing began with the first white settlement of Australia when Indigenous people were positioned as not quite human: "Human evolutionary ideas ... had the Aboriginal closer to an ape than an Englishman" (Crawford, 1989: 14). This positioning justified extreme silencing: "killing was regarded as a justifiable preventative measure" (Rowley, 1970: 72) where not only voices were silenced, but where an entire race was targeted for extermination. Later in Australian history, silencing occurred through enforced

assimilation: attempts to change Indigenous people, so they more closely matched the white norm.

The objectives of White Australia were assimilationist, creating an ethnically homogeneous society. The Aboriginal population was expected to die out, with those of 'mixed race' (now the majority) assimilating into the majority population to the point of eventual invisibility (Jupp, 1995: 208)

In more recent times, silencing continues, with Indigenous voices silenced through overly punitive actions when those voices speak something contrary to the norm. In the case of our work on the Indigenous child care plan, the work was embargoed, and the team was subject to legal sanctions were they to share any of the ideas collected from Indigenous participants. Vignette 8 shows that the voices of Indigenous families are still silenced, even when those voices speak for their most vulnerable members, their children. Vignette 9 is a timely reminder, particularly given the recent George Floyd riots and the Black Lives Matter protests worldwide (Bing News, 2020), that racism continues to exist throughout our societal

structures, including our justice system. The voices of Indigenous people subject to this inequitable treatment may be heard in riots and protests but continue to appear to make little impact on the systems that oppress them.

Discussion

As identified in our Conceptual Framework, there are multiple examples of the way in which the voices of those who are marginalised are silenced in our neoliberal context and examples of how those who do speak out are attacked and denigrated. The attacks may focus on the speaker, as in the case of Greta Thunberg. For example, leaders around the world spoke out against Greta Thunberg, including the Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Donald Trump, the President of the USA and media sources including Andrew Bolt. Attacking the speaker creates a climate of fear. For example, one of the victims of child sexual abuse was quoted as saying: "Who's gonna believe a little boy from a home against that conglomerate mate, you know, against that bloody Goliath? [Alleged victim of child sexual abuse 'Bernie' (Fulton, 2020, 26.37)]. The Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse showed the role our institutions, including educational institutions, have played in silencing children's voices.

Alternatively, attacks may focus on the message, attempting to falsify the message or simply ignore what is being said. The example of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody is an example of this. Despite official government findings of inequities, the situation has not improved, rather it has gotten worse. One might argue the same in terms of the recent deaths of black men in police custody in the USA; such inequities were well known, and nothing changed until a flashpoint was reached. The recent death of George Floyd triggered international Black Lives Matter riots. Whether such awareness will actually make a difference is yet to be seen. The climate change debate provides multiple examples of 'experts' claiming that the climate change evidence is false. For example, 56% of Republicans in the USA Congress claim that the climate change evidence is false, some even claiming that the evidence is a hoax (Gregoire, 2015). Digital media plays a role in creating networked communities that share climate change information and misinformation and create a spurious sense of legitimacy (Bloomfield and Tillery, 2019).

It is normal human behaviour to seek information that supports one's own position, a trait labelled as confirmation bias by Ball (2017), and the internet makes it possible for people to easily create networks of like-minded people. This human characteristic makes it even more likely that voices speaking

something different are not heard, even to the extent of following the majority. Ball, for example, cites research demonstrating that "59% of people would confirm the popular answer" even when that went against their own experience (Ball, 2017: 188). Kaiser (2019) argues that it is exceptionally difficult to change people's opinions when these opinions are supported by others in their group and when the opinions fit with their own values. For example, in a Swedish study, Jylhä et al. (2019) found that negative attitudes toward feminism and women coupled with right-wing socioeconomic attitudes were linked to climate change denial, suggesting that there are groups of values that feed into each other to create a particular mindset. This suggests that minority voices speaking messages that run counter to hegemonic, neoliberal ideological positions are facing difficulty to be heard and to have an impact. Not only are they speaking against the 'norm', they have to counter the human propensity to fit in with the majority, to be perceived as part of the group.

As a consequence, we argue that whilst the UN Declaration of Human Rights is a crucially important document, there are elements in our current culture that act against its implementation. The ability of humans to challenge their own values and thinking is dependent on education (see Seligson et al, 2019 for example). Unfortunately, in our neoliberal world, it appears that schools are not perceived as a tool for values education. For example, the history of inequitable school attendance and performance for Indigenous peoples demonstrates that schools are not providing equal opportunities for minority Indigenous voices to learn the skills needed for their voices to be heard. In Vignette 3, it is reported the NSW Education Minister Sarah Mitchell said it was "deeply concerning to see three-year-olds politicised, regardless of the issue." "Children this age should be engaging in play-based learning, not being co-opted into political games by the Opposition" (Daily Mail, 2019). Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison was reported as saying: "Each day I send my kids to school and I know other members' kids should also go to school but we do not support our schools being turned into parliaments," and "What we want is more learning in schools and less activism in schools" (BBC, 2019). In a world where hegemonic neoliberal principles strongly influence a large percent of our population, where people are more likely to follow the group rather than take a lone stand, the opportunities for silenced voices to be heard and to make an impact are very few, despite evidence of acts of courage from some. Until the neoliberal ideal of standardisation and conformity are challenged, this is not likely to change. However, as educators, researchers and educational workers, we need to reflect deeply on the structures in our workplaces and in our own practices.

Need for further research

This paper highlights the systemic power within our neoliberal society and how those with power position those without power through dampening, silencing or belittling their voice, effectively ignoring their human rights. While there are studies about neoliberalism, human rights, power, silencing and marginalised voices, this study has provided a platform to bring these some challenging issues together to discuss some of the difficulties marginalised groups face within Australian society. Further multidisciplinary research and discussion about the rights and the barriers to achieving those rights are evident for children, victims of child sexual abuse and Indigenous people within our society to increase awareness and offer a way to address these issues.

Conclusion

This paper has explored examples of the power of people within the neoliberal context when marginalised groups speak out against practices that are viewed as infringing human rights. The responses by those in power suggest that they are threatened by these actions and then aim to silence those who speak out by belittling them and suggesting disbelief of the marginalised persons' actions. However, it is clear that the actions of those who have spoken out are bringing about change: for example, Greta Thunberg has mobilised millions of school children to demonstrate against lack of action on climate change, which has raised awareness throughout the world of this issue. If our societies are to be 'free' then in the words of Crossman (in Fitzhenry, 1986) 'The main task of a free society is to civilise the struggle for power' (R H S Crossman in Fitzhenry, 1986: 239).

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Appendix

Vignette 1

"In August, (2018) when she was still 15, Ms Thunberg protested outside the Swedish Parliament with a sign reading "school strike for climate". It quickly inspired a global movement, with thousands of Australian students striking to demand climate change action in November (2018) and again in March (2019).

"Over the past year, Ms Thunberg has taken her message, calling out what she sees as a lack of necessary action on climate change, to the World Economic Forum in Davos; the EU Parliament in Strasbourg; and the National Assembly in Paris.

"This ongoing irresponsible behaviour will no doubt be remembered in history as one of the greatest failures of humankind," she told British MPs in April (BBC, 2019, April 23).

She agreed that she was too young to be doing all this, but that she felt she had to. "If everyone listened to the scientists and the facts that I constantly refer to, then no one would have to listen to me or any of the other hundreds of thousands of school children on strike for the climate across the world," she wrote. (Australian Broadcasting Commission [ABC] News, 2019, August 2).

Vignette 2

Those people in power, such as the President of the USA, Australian Prime Minister, reporters on national television, and those making money out of coal mining, that has been linked to climate change, hit back calling Greta 'deeply disturbed', that she 'should work on her anger management', and that she should 'chill', go and see a movie and go to school. Some described her as a hero (and a villain), while others viewed Greta as brainwashed as the following quotes highlight:

"Swedish climate change activist Greta Thunberg has hit back after being called the 'deeply disturbed messiah of the global warming movement' in an Australian newspaper column. The 16-year-old says what disturbs her is children being attacked for acting on the science of climate change. I have never seen a girl so young and with so many mental disorders treated by so many adults as a guru," Andrew Bolt (ABC News, 2019, August 2)

"Greta must work on her Anger Management problem, then go to a good old-fashioned movie with a friend! Chill Greta, Chill!" Mr Trump wrote on Twitter (The Guardian, 2019a)

"You say children shouldn't worry ... don't be so pessimistic and then, nothing, silence," Ms Thunberg said.

"It was shocking see our prime minister condemning students as young as eight, who are sacrificing a day of schooling to stand up for a safe climate future," Sykes told AAP. "When young people try to have a voice in politics, Scott Morrison is shutting them down, yet he's happy to listen to the coal lobby and big corporations who continue to profit from making climate change worse."

"Each day I send my kids to school and I know other members' kids should also go to school but we do not support our schools being turned into parliaments," Morrison told parliament on Monday. "What we want is more learning in schools and less activism in schools." Scott Morrison has responded to an impassioned speech by the Swedish teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg at the United Nations by declaring the climate change debate is subjecting Australian children to "needless anxiety". (The Guardian, 2019b)

"Greta has galvanised the world's attention on the most important problem in human history in a way that no one has ever done before," says Holtaus. "She has become both a hero and a villain, depending on your willingness to accept the blunt truths she tells. Her critics say her approach is too confrontational, too divisive." (Irish Times, 2019)

An analysis of how the media and those in power have responded to Greta was presented by Media Watch host, Paul Barry. Barry cited various verbal media presentations including those above and one from Fox News in the US that stated: "The adult who brainwashed these kids should be brought up on charges of child abuse". Barry then addressed the responses to Greta's address to the UN by asking "Why does she get them so angry? Is it because the adults are finally taking notice? The world is listening to a 16-year-old girl for the first time in history. You (pointing at the audience) have more brains compared to some in the media" (Media Watch, 2019).

Vignette 3

Educators at a community preschool have facilitated children as young as three to solicit signatures and lobby the government to fly the Aboriginal flag permanently on the Harbour Bridge. But a child psychologist has warned the children have no idea of the issues at stake and are merely being used as pawns to achieve the political objectives of adults.

"These children do not even have the cognitive ability to understand what a petition is," child psychologist Dr Michael Carr-Gregg said. "I think the idea of roping children into political campaigns seems to be in vogue. Children should not be used as props."

The spokesman dismissed scepticism about the children's understanding of the issues and said that as educators "we listen to the children and ask them how they want to help." That argument has been dismissed by educators who said the children under five would not know how to spell "advocate" let alone know what it means or comprehend 10,000 as a number. "It's ridiculous, they are being manipulated," said one primary school teacher.

NSW Education Minister Sarah Mitchell said it was "deeply concerning to see three-year-olds politicised, regardless of the issue...Children this age should be engaging in play-based learning, not being co-opted into political games by the Opposition."

Aboriginal leader and politician Warren Mundine said the issue was not about the Aboriginal flag but what children were being taught. "I always love seeing the Aboriginal flag flying, but preschoolers becoming activists ... I just smiled," he said.

The children had been taught respect for Aboriginal land during a campaign to get the council to put a bin on a nearby park that they were told was traditionally Cammeraygal land. "All of this began around the idea that there was an absence of respect," the spokesman said (Daily Mail, 2019, October 23).

Vignette 4

During an interview with ABC Journalist, Sarah Ferguson, for the television documentary series 'Revelation', with an alleged victim of child sexual abuse, 'Bernie' stated: 'I would hear Pell's become Bishop, Pell's become Archbishop, Pell's become a Cardinal. As he climbed his ladder, his stupid bloody Papal greasy ladder that he was climbing, it confirmed to me more and more, that I was never to come forward. (Crying) Who's gonna believe a little boy from a home against that conglomerate mate, you know, against that bloody

Goliath (Fulton, 2020, 26.37). Asked what he wanted to happen now that he had made his allegations public which he found very difficult '(Crying) I want to heal, now I've carried that burden for long enough; the shame, the embarrassment.... I wanna wake up tomorrow and I'm the Bernie I want to be, mate' (Fulton, 2020, 1:39.54).

Vignette 5

In the same episode, Ferguson interviewed solicitors who had represented victims and alleged victims of child abuse, who talked about the power shift they had noticed in recent times. 'The tables are turning. The power imbalance is beginning to shift' reported Judy Courtin, a solicitor in a historic child abuse case against the Catholic Church' (Fulton, 2020, 1:35.34). Another said 'A lot has been achieved because people have had the courage to come forward, and the children are finally doing now what the Catholic Church never did. They are coming forward and reporting matters to the police. And nothing is going to silence those voices now' claimed Dr Viv Waller, Solicitor for Witness J, the former choirboy who accused Cardinal George Pell (Fulton, 2020, 1:36.34). There were also those within the church's hierarchy who could see the magnitude of the problems involved now that the voices were gathering confidence, commented 'See they didn't have love (talking of those priests who have abused children). They had lust and kids need to be loved and not just by mum and dad. They need to feel safe and secure. If they are lusted after, they are ruined.... We're in a mess, aren't we?' (Fulton, 2020, 1:38.01). Archbishop Mark Coleridge speaking from the Vatican's Emergency Summit on Child Sexual Abuse went further, 'We are dealing with a global emergency (and I don't think that language is too strong), a global emergency that requires a global response' (Fulton, 2020, 9.03). He offered this prayer in the Vatican during the summit 'This homily is a meditation upon power. At the heart of what we call child abuse, there is power and its dark and destructive use.... We have seen victims and survivors as the enemy, but we have not loved them. We have not blessed them..... We will do all that we can to bring justice and healing to survivors of abuse. We

will listen to them, believe them, walk with them. We will ensure that those who have abused are never again able to offend' (Fulton, 2020, 1:39.23).

Vignette 6

The right-wing media journalist for Sky News, Andrew Bolt (Bolt, 2020), commented on the Australian High Court Decision on Cardinal George Pell's appeal, allowing him to leave gaol, 'This was one of the greatest miscarriages of justice in Australian history. A lot of people today should be ashamed of their role in the persecution, the witch-hunting and jailing, for 404 days, of an innocent man. The charges were inherently implausible (para. 2-4)'. In an interview with Andrew Bolt, Cardinal Pell (Pell, 2020) commented on why the alleged victim, Witness J, might have accused him 'I don't know. I wonder whether he was used. Our memory is so fallible. I don't know what this poor fellow was up to.' Cardinal George Pell speaking about former choirboy, Witness J who he was accused of abusing (Pell, 2020, 30.29). He then spoke more broadly about the issue of the silencing of children's voices and the issues of power 'The pendulum 30 or 40 years ago was massively against anybody who said that they'd been attacked. Nowadays, we don't want it to swing back so that every accusation is regarded as gospel truth. That would be quite unjust and inappropriate.' Cardinal Pell (Pell, 2020, 48.23). Pope Francis preached at a service for the pilgrims on the eve of the Vatican Emergency Summit into Child Sexual Abuse, saying 'You can't live all your life by accusing, accusing and accusing the Church. Who is the accuser? Who? Who in the Bible is called the Great Accuser? Who?...The Devil...they are friends, cousins and relatives of the devil and this is wrong' (Fulton, 2020, 13.08). He also offered this tweet after Cardinal George Pell was released from jail in April 2020 'Let us pray together today for all those persons who suffer due to an unjust sentence because of someone had it in for them' (Pope Francis @Pontifex, 2020).

Vignette 7

Around 15 years ago I was part of a consortium that successfully tendered for money from the federal government to research Indigenous communities around Australia to develop an Indigenous Child Care Plan (Saggers et al., 2006). At the time a number of Indigenous communities operated a Multifunctional Indigenous Children's Centre (MACC). These were funded separately from standard child care centres and ran a programme that not only offered child care for Indigenous children, but reached out into the community and supported Indigenous families in many different ways; programmes that were developed for each specific community to address specific community and family needs. As I understood the political landscape at the time, there was pressure to transfer the funding of these services to standard child care funding. I came to believe the subtext of the project was therefore to produce research that demonstrated such a transfer would be appropriate. However, what became extremely clear to the team as we travelled around the country visiting services and communities, was that transfer to hegemonic child care model and funding would result in significant diminution of services. In particular the unique outreach services offered at each MACC could not be supported if services were only funded based on the number of children attending each day. The report submitted made this clear and provided a range of evidence in support. The team were planning a range of publications based on their findings which they believed would honour the many participants who so generously provided their input. However, the report was embargoed and the team were unable to publicly share any of the findings. Indigenous agencies and MACCs continued to resist what amounted to a significant cut in their services for some years without the evidence accrued in the report to support them. Team members had to be very circumspect in their support of this fight, needing to ensure any information provided could be identified from sources other than the research and consequent report (for example Sims et al., 2008). Eventually the report was released under the FOI process, but this occurred much too late for the data to be of any use. Thus, the expenditure of a significant amount of government funds was ultimately not beneficial to Indigenous communities nor able to be used to develop effective Indigenous early childhood services.

Vignette 8

It is well known that more children with an Indigenous, rather than a non-Indigenous background continue to be removed from their families. In Western Australia, for example, in 2018 64.4/1000 children from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds had been removed by the Western Australian Department for Child Protection compared to 3.6/100 children from a non-Indigenous background (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2020). This discrepancy remains despite the existence of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, developed in the 1970s, which aims to maintain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's links with community and land through ensuring that family and community are involved in decisions related to children's welfare (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2015).

Despite this principle, which might be perceived as reflecting the basic human rights of Indigenous children, the WA Parliament are currently debating the Children and Community Services Amendment Bill 2019 (WA) which specifies that an Aboriginal child may be removed from the family after consultation with only one family member and potentially one Aboriginal organisation (Noongar Family Safety and Wellbeing Council and Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, 2020). Such a provision is not universal across Australia. For example in Victoria the Aboriginal Family-led Decision Making process emphasises the importance of the family group (that is more than one family member) and children's connections to community (Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). In their press release the Noongar Family Safety and Wellbeing Council and Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (2020: 2) argue: "The proposed law goes against human rights principles set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which is supported by the Australian government." Whilst it is not yet clear if these Indigenous voices will be heard, and the proposed law voted down as a consequence, what is clear is that Indigenous voices were not sufficiently recognised in the drawing up of this proposed legislation in the first place.

Vignette 9

Over 25 years ago (10 August 1987) the then Australian Prime Minister, Hawke, announced he was forming a Royal Commission to investigate the deaths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody in state and territory jails between 1 January 1980 and 31 May 1989 (National Archives of Australia, 2020). In total, 99 deaths were investigated, and the Commission generated 339 recommendations aiming at reducing the high number of Indigenous deaths; at the time it was estimated that one Indigenous person died in custody even 11 days (Anthony, 2016). The findings identified that the higher rate of death of Indigenous people in custody was because Indigenous people were much more likely to be in custody than non-Indigenous people. The reasons for this higher incarceration rate were attributed firstly to police prejudice, where minor crimes such as being a public nuisance, or being intoxicated in public, were more likely to result in jail time for an Indigenous person. Secondly, Indigenous people were more likely to be arrested than warned by police. Thirdly, Indigenous people were less likely to be given bail, and finally, more likely to be given custodial sentences by the court system. The findings also highlighted a lack of care of Indigenous people in custody and stories of police abuse and mistreatment.

Unfortunately, despite the aim of the many recommendations arising from the Commission, the reality today is worse. In 1991, Anthony (2016) reports Indigenous people made up 14% of the total prison population, whereas by 2016 this figure had increased to 27% but in 2016, Indigenous people made up 3.3% of the total Australian population (in 2016, Indigenous people made up 3.3% of the total Australian population: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Since the Commission, the government has continued to increasingly "penalise vulnerable Indigenous people (by removing children from their families, criminalising youth and women victims of family violence, and locking up the mentally ill)" (Anthony, 2016: 4). At the same time, funding has increasingly been removed from Indigenous organisations with the aim of moving Indigenous services into the mainstream, resulting in the reduction of Indigenous representation and Indigenous voice.