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Troubling/Transforming Working Lives: Judith Butler, Gender, Work and Organization

Troubling organizational violence with Judith Butler: Surviving whistleblower reprisals

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How do workers who encounter violence by deviating from organizational norms make sense of their experiences? Our article engages with Judith Butler's work on vulnerability and troubling to address this. Inspired by these concepts while analyzing empirical data gathered from whistleblowers in financial services, we propose a framing termed "aggression-troubling". Aggression-troubling encompasses an awareness of: the vulnerability and relationality attending scenes of organizational violence; how imposing ideals of what is "normal" come into play as part of that violence; and how these structures might be destabilized and disrupted—or troubled. Our second contribution is analytic: we find that the singular and immediate presence of the individual other-in-relation—the "you" responsible for exerting violence—is a critical part of how people make sense of the scene of violence. We adopt a methodological approach focused on how individuals' retrospective accounts of experiences of violence, and we analyze cases of whistleblowing in financial services to develop our arguments. Aggression-troubling by no means downplays the injury and pain that normative organizational violence can cause, nor does it suggest that power relations can easily be overturned. This framing does however offer a deeper exploration of experiences of normative violence. It provides

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insights into how it can be survived and potentially overcome, with contributions for research and practice.

KEYWORDS

aggression-troubling, Butler, performativity, vulnerability, whistleblowing

1 | INTRODUCTION

Violence can encompass overt and physical displays of aggression, but more recently, normative violence has come under scrutiny (Butler, 1990; Chambers, 2007). “The normative” for Butler represents a matrix of discourse through which “mundane violence (is) performed by certain kinds of... ideals” (Butler, 1990, p. xx). In organizations, normative violence occurs through the deployment and circulation of discursive categories. These categories can cause hurt and pain because they influence how workers in organizations are recognized as “normal” or not. Workers find themselves compelled into identifying with norms that do not allow for deviation (Riach et al., 2014, 2016). Excluding subjects from what is considered normal and acceptable can, in extreme cases, pave the way for more serious kinds of violence.

Moreover, deviation from the norm can be actively and aggressively policed by others within the organization: colleagues and managers, for example, whose actions aim to restore the status quo through punishing transgressions. Resistance is possible. In some cases, excluded, abjected workers can lay their own claim to norms that injure them, reshaping and rewriting such norms albeit always within a field of constraint (cf. Butler, 1990; Tyler, 2019). Yet we are limited in our understanding of the subjective experiences of workers who encounter organizational violence and aggression as a result of stepping outside dominant norms, and our theoretical framings remain thin.

It is critical that we examine this aspect of organizational life in more depth. Anemic understanding means that organizational violence against workers is assumed to be all-powerful and impossible to resist: a potential disaster for the worker. The painful impacts of violating norms are well-known and amplified through the media. With this impression holding sway, fewer people attempt deviation through transgression because to do so is to invite debilitating violence. This means that organizations engaged in normative violence proceed with impunity, while suffering results.

In research on normative organizational violence, three specific areas remain underexplored. First is a nuanced understanding of how the worker, who deviates from the norm and experiences violence as a result, makes sense of the “scene” of interaction. If norms can be aggressively policed within organizations, how is this policing understood by its “target” subject? Second, does normative violence act in a straightforward manner to discipline and restrain the transgressive worker—or can this violence go awry? Third, what occurs when norms of acceptable speech, when transgressed, give rise to violence? For example, when a worker aims to whistleblow—to speak truth to power about wrongdoing witnessed—what nuances and ambiguities accompany the imposition of norms preventing truth speech? It is these research questions to which we address our article with the aim of a deeper understanding of scenes of normative violence in organizations.

In exploring these questions, our article draws on a specific kind of organizational violence: whistleblower reprisal. Whistleblower reprisal can involve normative violence. When a worker is “cast out” for speaking up about wrongdoing, they can be excluded—both practically and also ontologically—from occupying a recognizable place within the organization. In some cases, whistleblowers are cast out from their industry through formal or informal blacklisting (Alford, 2001; Perry, 1998). This ontologically separate, isolated, and liminal existence contributes to the well-known mental health struggles of whistleblowers (Lennane, 2012; Smith, 2014). Kenny (2019) draws on the concept of abjection as developed by Julia Kristeva and interpreted by Judith Butler to explain the painful impacts of whistleblower reprisal resulting in isolation. Whistleblowers can be named as deviant and transgressive. When

people are excluded from norms of “acceptable” worker, because they engage in unacceptable speech that aims to counter a status quo in which workers are required to remain complicit and silent in the face of wrongdoing, they become “impossible” in the eyes of the organization. No longer legitimate and valid worker subjects, violence against these transgressors goes unremarked (Kenny, 2018). Whistleblower reprisal thus joins other kinds of policing via exclusion from norms, offering a useful exemplar of this kind of organizational violence.

Our article begins by discussing key ideas from Butler's work relating to normative violence, vulnerability, and troubling, which have heretofore remained conceptually separate, more-or-less. It is fruitful to think these together to understand contemporary organizations and the violence that can occur therein. We then introduce an exemplar empirical study drawing on recently gathered qualitative research data in cases of whistleblower reprisal in financial services in France, the U.S., and Ireland. We present women whistleblowers' accounts of experiences of reprisal that happened to them. Analyzing our data gives rise to three particular dimensions: violent reprisals intent on silencing via imposing norms, the role of specific others in dispensing violence within specific scenes of address, and the troubling of attempts to impose hurtful ideals of “normal” complicit workers. Considering these dimensions together, we propose a novel concept, “aggression-troubling”. This sheds light on scenes of normative organizational violence with implications for theory and for practice.

1.1 | Violence and transgression in Judith Butler's work

Why Butler? Butler is recognized as among today's most influential philosophers (Lloyd, 2007; Tyler, 2019). Their work unpacks subjectivity and the power structures that can influence it, via a phenomenological and critical approach (Butler, 1990, 2004). Butler's ideas have inspired organizational analyses (Hodgson, 2005; Kenny, 2009; Parker, 2002; Rhodes & Pullen, 2007; Thanem & Wallenberg, 2016, see in particular Tyler, 2019), including research on gender and sexuality in organizations (Fotaki & Harding, 2017; Harding, 2013) and on the abjection and suffering of workers excluded by organizational norms and discourses (Kenny, 2018; Riach et al., 2016). In this article, we draw both on Butler's early work on troubling dominant norms (Butler, 1990), and more recent ideas on vulnerability developed alongside feminist collaborators (Butler, 2021; Butler & Athanasiou, 2013), bringing these together in conversation in the context of workers experiencing violence and aggression because of deviating from organizational norms.

1.2 | Vulnerability and the ontology of the subject

Vulnerability, for Butler, is what opens us to risk but also makes possible connections with others (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013). We are vulnerable because we are, as subjects, radically dependent on others. In their early work, Butler developed Foucault's work on subject positions by drawing on Freud to show how subjection to discourse can be “traced in the turns of psychic life” (Butler, 1997, p. 18). For Butler, psychic life is radically social, the psyche is intrinsically shaped by the “outside” world of language. The subject emerges alongside the positions offered to it in language through the operation of norms and discourse; one cannot exist outside of them because this would mean existing outside the categories of identity that offer a valid and recognizable position in the world. This implies an “ek-static” view on what the “self” is—it is radically outside of itself (Butler, 2004, p. 1). “The terms that make up one's own gender”, for example, “are, from the start, outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author” (Butler, 2004, p. 1). In contrast to other theories of identification and subjectivity, “ek-static subjectivity” places power at a center stage.

In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler develops some implications of ek-static subjecthood. Examining what occurs when people are called to account for their behaviors, including ethical transgressions, they describe how the “I” that emerges is dislocated. When we speak, we evoke a myriad of others—through language, histories, and experiences, none of which we have authored (Butler, 2005). Ek-static subjectivity thus opens up questions of

whether ethical responsibility can be assigned to singular subjects, and problematizes simplistic accusations of blame. Yet, ek-static subjectivity also renders us radically dependent on, and responsible for, others, something Butler goes on to explore in later work.

In collaboration with feminist scholars, Butler examines how our ek-stasis leaves us vulnerable. We are more fundamentally dependent than we may assume, upon those others that enable existence. Recognition as a valid, legitimate subject—in the terms offered by dominant norms at play in a given setting—is critical both for one's sense of self but also for one's survival (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013). This mutual constitution of self by other introduces a novel ontology of the subject—as vulnerable; “If I seek to preserve your life, it is not only because I seek to preserve my own, but because who “I” am is nothing without your life, and life itself has to be rethought as this complex, passionate, antagonistic, and necessary set of relations to others” (Butler, 2009, p. 44).

Vulnerability leaves us susceptible to violence and hurt. We can find ourselves compelled into identification with norms that injure us, because they also offer us a valid place in the world (Butler, 2004). Workers, for example, can experience painful identifications with dominant and prescriptive norms of heterosexuality or aging (Riach et al., 2014, 2016) or what it means to be named a “proper” employee or manager (Harding, 2003, 2013), norms with which they have little choice but to identify (see Tyler, 2019 for a valuable overview). If workers reject these painful identifications and step outside, they can find themselves excluded from what is deemed to be “normal”. Such exclusions are felt as pain because of the constitutive nature of these attachments to one's organizations and colleagues, attachments that secure a valid place in the world.

Butler thus holds that attachments to norms, dependencies, and connections to others are intrinsic to our survival both symbolically but also literally. Acknowledging vulnerability means acknowledging responsibility for others. Butler's novel ontology of the subject inspires alternative readings of business ethics and organizational dynamics based on the challenges posed by the radically social, ek-static self to traditional ways of understanding personhood (Fotaki, 2017; Fotaki & Harding, 2017; Kenny & Fotaki, 2015; Pullen et al., 2016; Tyler, 2019). The other is at the heart of notions of the subject: in how she speaks and in how she survives. Violence can accompany attempts to force norms of behavior, something we explore further here.

1.3 | Troubling norms

Butler's early work demonstrated how norms are not static but open to revision. They famously highlighted the contingency of gender identities that were traditionally thought of as inevitable and essential, including stereotypical subject positions of “masculine” and “feminine” (Butler, 1990). Since then, their work continues to develop a politics of subversion. They explore the ways “in which the normative regimes that govern or condition intelligibility, and therefore the terms of recognition, might be contested” (Tyler, 2019, p. 47). Central to this contestation is their idea of troubling: norms do not persist in social life in a straightforward way, rather they are re-cited, performed differently, re-iterated, all of which opens up space—sometimes—for norms to change.

Humor and parody can play a role in troubling norms. To parody is to generate a copy of a supposed original, make fun of it, and in so doing, to show the instability and contingency of the original (Hariman, 2008; Rhodes & Pullen, 2007). When the original in question is supported by structures of power that appear unchanging and hegemonic, parody can help destabilize that power by allowing us to see potential alternatives (Butler, 1990). Parody works by placing a double side-by-side with the original that it apes. The juxtaposition demands that we question the so-called “knowledge” we are drawing upon when we make our judgments. We become aware that this knowledge is not unquestionable but rather arrives via norms we have accepted (Butler, 1990, p. xxii) with Butler using the example of drag performance to illustrate the contingency of traditional gender norms. We begin to see, therefore, that the knowledge that presents itself to us as reified can in fact be altered. The affective pull of the pleasure of laughter forms part of Butler's framing of how parody works. It is the “pleasure, the giddiness of the performance” of good parody that enables us to see the “radical contingency” of powerful categories to realize that “all along, the original was derived” (Butler, 1990, p. 175–176). Laughter enables us to “relax” in the presence of power (Hariman, 2008).

Bringing these ideas together and returning to Butler's understanding of normative violence, the task remains how to understand the exertion of mundane violence on subjects who are compelled into adhering to particular ideals (1990, p. xx). The focus should be on: How these ideals are imposed on people by structures of power and discourse, the violence involved in this, the vulnerability of subjects to it, and of course, how the normative authority can be destabilized and troubled.

Whistleblowing is an exemplar of how, in organizations, workers can "make trouble", specifically when workers' whistleblowing disclosures draw violent reprisals but they continue to speak regardless. Whistleblower retaliation is "undesirable action taken against a whistleblower—in direct response to the whistle-blowing—who reported wrongdoing internally or externally, outside the organization" (Rehg et al., 2008, p. 222). Punishing disclosers is not the norm: reprisals occur in roughly one in five cases of disclosure (Transparency International Ireland, 2017). But when they do occur, reprisals can cause suffering and pain. Retaliation can involve demotion, being given menial tasks, bullying by colleagues and superiors, isolation by one's peers, and in more serious cases dismissal and—where disclosures have been made in the public sphere—smear campaigns orchestrated through the media alongside black-listing in one's industry (Kenny & Fotaki, 2023). The impacts on one's mental and physical health can be severe, while family and support relationships can suffer (Kenny et al., 2019; Lennane, 2012; Rothschild & Miethe, 1999). In many organizations engaged in serious wrongdoing, norms of complicity are in place that prevent workers speaking up (Kaptein, 2011). Whistleblower reprisal involves aggressive policing of those norms through actions designed to silence a worker speaking out in defiance. Excessive reprisal generates "chill effects" that deter other, would-be disclosers (Devine & Maassarani, 2011). Whistleblower reprisals thus act to restore the status quo and normalize complicity (Alford, 2001; Miceli et al., 2008). Returning to Butler, they are exemplars of normative violence designed to impose a certain ideal: in this case, the ideal of complicit worker who will not speak out about wrongdoing.

Given our interest in how this normative violence operates in practice, how subjects respond, and whether and how the structures that impose the ideals might be troubled, whistleblowing offers an ideal case-in-point. Butler's work on vulnerability in resistance, and troubling norms, offers potential for understanding the experiences of those targeted but also their responses and survival strategies. In turn, empirical examination of specific "scenes of address" as narrated by whistleblowers might offer a further development of Butler's work bringing together the heretofore disparate concepts of vulnerability and trouble.

2 | METHODS

2.1 | Data collection

The interview data are drawn from two prior research projects carried out separately by each author over a period of 7 years (2007–2014) examining whistleblowing in the financial industry. Both projects used similar interpretive approaches to data collection, which allowed us to combine the datasets, as other scholars have done (Reay et al., 2013), including in whistleblowing studies (Kenny et al., 2018). We understand whistleblowing as the "reporting of wrongdoing by a person who has reasonable grounds to believe that the information reported is true at the time" (ISO, 2021). Our specific interest was in developing a nuanced understanding of how workers deviating from norms make sense of violence experienced as a result. We thus examined accounts from women who blew the whistle in France, Ireland, and the US. All were subject to reprisals as a result of speaking up; yet each woman succeeded in drawing public attention to serious wrongdoing taking place in their bank. Because our aim was in-depth analysis of interviewees' accounts, our dataset comprises qualitative interviews (Rothschild, 2013). In both projects, interviewees were selected utilizing the snowball sampling technique common to this area of study (Van Portfliet & Kenny, 2021). Interviewees occupied different senior positions, including Loan Supervisor, Executive Vice-President, Senior Risk Analyst, Compliance Manager, and Communication Project Manager. They all experienced the financial industry in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis. This common background is not trivial, since all of them described the

TABLE 1 Interview data.

| Person | Position | Type of organization | Original observation | Country |
|--------|--------------------------|---|---|---------|
| Jane | Executive Vice President | Mortgage institution | Supplying the US government with misleading information on mortgages and home insurance | USA |
| Maria | Senior Risk Analyst | National investment bank—department specializing in middle-market insurance companies | Systematic underevaluation of bank's client accounts' risks in order to favor business | France |

highly-masculine structures and cultures they worked in, and how these aspects colored the retaliation dynamics experienced. In both projects, interviews examined people's open-ended narratives of their professional work, the way their experience of whistleblowing unfolded, and the reprisals they encountered (Essers, 2009). The interviews typically lasted between one and three hours. Adhering to our institutions' ethical protocols, we were prepared to offer advice on sources of help should participants become distressed. For reasons of space, our analysis here focuses on two women: Jane and Maria (see Table 1). Interviews with Maria were held in French and translated by Author 2. Names as well as companies have been anonymized.

2.2 | Producing analysis

Both authors have conducted in-depth studies of whistleblowing and are familiar with the whistleblowing literature. Initial discussions between us suggested something unusual and surprising in the way the financial services women in our dataset described speaking out, and we decided to pursue an analysis of this subset. We drew on Charmaz's (2006) modified approach to interpretive data analysis in which grounded theory is informed and shaped by new theoretical perspectives. The ontology of the subject—as vulnerable and ek-static—informed our work (Butler, 2004). Butler's (2005) interrogation of how individuals “give accounts of themselves” when reflecting on actions, offers rich insight. They examine how, when we narrate ourselves as “I”, the decentering of the subject becomes clear. As soon as we begin to speak, our embeddedness in wider sociality emerges. We speak through language that comes from elsewhere; our experiences are formed and shaped by a range of historical, political, and psychic influences that are not of our choosing (Butler, 2005, p. 7–8). The subject that emerges “as oneself”, when we are asked to give account, is thus radically shaped by others. Western epistemologies and ontologies tend to demand narrative accountability from individual subjects with the assumption that one acts agentically and is therefore fully responsible at all times. But perhaps we might rethink the interpretation of narrative accounts (Butler, 2005, p. 63). The inherently relational “I” that appears can be read as shedding light on the conditions surrounding the particular and specific scene of narration and the attendant histories and attachments (Contu, 2020; Peretz and Mandalaki, 2023; Tyler, 2019).

We each read through our datasets separately, identifying instances of where the “I” was evoked. Extended notes were produced and compared before we came together to discuss emergent themes. We moved back and forth, reading and re-reading our data, categorizing sections of text for initial coding. Our first set of themes were: “perceptions of selves”, “empathy and emotions”, “understanding for the wrongdoers”, “desire to cure the company”, and “perceptions of morality and justice”. Returning to literature for further analysis, we became sensitive to articulations of violence, the presence and influence of other people, and how norms were evoked, transgressed, or troubled. These dimensions reappeared throughout interviewee accounts and appeared to us to be unusual when compared with extant research, so we explored further (Cunliffe, 2022). Iteration between data and theory gave rise to four second-level codes: Empathy for attackers, Pain through empathy, Humorous accounts of aggressors, and Parody of pain. Input from reviewers prompted us to return to our data to further refine our arguments giving rise to the three themes detailed in our findings.

In producing this account, our own “I”s inevitably come to bear. We acknowledge our privilege in not having gone through what these women have suffered, but having experienced minor aggressions, we recognized something of the hurt and the violence, which is likely what drew us to the project. That said, we were not always aware of how our own selves shaped what we were writing. We each found a sense of resonance when reading our interviewees’ accounts. We found them difficult and painful to read but some aspects also made us smile—when our interviewees recounted their dogged persistence in the face of reprisal, or when they described ironic and almost humorous moments. Initially we noted this “humor” as a key category, developing the idea that it offered respite from violent reprisals. Initially, we did not foreground the violence inherent to the accounts we were reading. Reflecting, this may be because, working on whistleblowing research for many years, we had become inured to the violence of whistleblower reprisal having seen so many such cases. The humor was the striking part, we agreed; we would focus on this. It took the mirror of editor and reviewer comments to prompt us to rethink how we had minimized the acts of violence, and to reflect upon how we had brought our own framings to bear on the setting. We found that commitment to the adopted analytic approach—how the “I” narrates its own history—helped us return to this.

To enable conceptual development, in what follows, we weave our theoretical insights with findings allowing the analysis to proceed iteratively.

3 | FINDINGS

In each woman’s organization, the “new financial culture” was evident. All women in our dataset described how accepted behaviors had changed over the past 20 years. As was happening in many countries’ banking sectors, profits were increasingly prioritized over rule-following and compliance, while short-term goals took precedence over the longer-term health of the organization and customer interests (O’Brien, 2009; O’Brien & Gilligan, 2013; Salter, 2012). Our interviewees frequently discussed how this new culture went against their personal values in which adherence to the rules, and honoring the espoused values of banking as a social good, ought to come first.

We were particularly interested in how interviewees articulated what happened after they had spoken up in defense of those values. Specifically, how they framed and narrated the experience of being under attack—the recipients of reprisal—for speaking out against wrongdoing in their firms. Three aspects appeared particularly salient: violent reprisals intent on silencing; the presence of a specific other as the author of violence in the scene of address; and the troubling of attempts to impose a normative ideal of complicit worker, even where painful.

3.1 | Violent reprisals intent on silencing

Jane held a position of Executive Vice-President for Fraud at a US mortgage bank. She recalled how she had elevated her concerns about widespread mortgage fraud first to her boss. He confronted some managers involved:

Then when my boss went and you know, said, ‘Knock this stuff off, right this minute! You know. And said; ‘this is ridiculous.’ They threatened him too. He came back and he said, ‘You are on your own Jane, and I can’t do anything anymore, I cannot talk to you anymore.’

Jane escalated the issue to senior managers. One responded by downplaying what she had described:

He tried to say ‘hey, you know what, none of this is fraud, it was just all, you know, just trying to give really good customer service [...] and book these loans for people as quickly as we can’. But a lot of it was fraud... It was against, you know, our policies and procedures and everything else...”

After reporting to outside regulators—which the law required—Jane became known within the organization as a whistleblower and suffered exclusion and isolation. As Vice-President for Fraud, she requested a formal investigation

into the widespread misconduct. An investigation began. But as Jane soon found out, it was an internal investigation into her own management practices. Her staff was interviewed: one colleague kept for 3 hours for aggressive questioning about Jane's management style. This kind of retaliatory investigation is a common form of whistleblower reprisal aimed at silencing. Shortly after the investigation, Jane was offered a deal for over \$200,000 in return for her silence about the fraud. She refused and was abruptly terminated. The formal reason was given as "inappropriate and unprofessional behavior" and "poor judgment as a leader".

Jane describes her last day at work. She was surprised by two Employee Relations colleagues who entered her office, without notice, to let her know the news of her dismissal, while two security guards hovered outside the door. She was informed that she was being fired, asked for her badge and told to sign a contract.

And they wanted all my stuff and I just said, 'here take it.' And I did bolt out of my office and I went... I went running to my [name of the bank] boss – to Jack's office – and I ran in and I said, 'they are terminating me.' He was like 'what?' And I said, 'they just terminated me.' And he said um 'I'll call Dan,' and I said 'I will call you from the car – they are coming after me (laughs),' because the two security guys come running after me! But you know, like my boss's office was just like fifty feet away and I just said, 'get away from me, I'm leaving,' and I just went down the elevator and out the door, you know, and drove home.

Jane took a case for wrongful dismissal against her organization and eventually won. She later recalled how colleagues and managers, including those in Employee Relations, were "engaged in the systematic cover-up of various types of fraud through terminating, harassing, and otherwise trying to silence employees who reported".

Maria was part of a small team in the Risk Department of a national bank in France. She supervised the assessment of the insurance companies to which the bank was providing credit. She was confronted with systematic misrepresentations of the extent of risk that her bank was carrying via its client companies. Maria repeatedly voiced concerns with the progressive lowering of standards and abandoning of precautions in risk detection practices. She raised complaints about the lax attitudes of her boss Yves, and senior managers, who would invariably favor the short-term commercial interests of the bank, despite being in charge of the Risk Department. Her bosses, she noted, did not share her commitment to rule-following. Maria reflected on how she had disclosed to the top director of the branch she worked in.

[Name] was polite, listening very carefully to what I would describe but also very, very clever; he would counter-argue everything. When you read his answers, they make sense in a way. But then when you look at it closely, it is still dishonest.

She recalls how he would re-frame her concerns as a non-issue. The behavior of Maria's boss was, he told her, nothing to worry about:

But, to sum up his main point, his point was always to say "What you explain, what you tell does not worry me". [Name] never said "no." Or he agreed in some ways [But] he just always said "I am not worried"...

Maria was sent back to work, her concerns firmly dismissed and overlooked. Continuing to speak up, she was progressively cast out. Her reports and documented advice were regularly rewritten by others, while her verbal objections were frequently contested. She was also relocated to another floor with little access to her former colleagues and excluded from her usual meetings.

Maria ended up being dismissed, allegedly for a "serious mistake". One of the reasons formally given for this decision was that she had deliberately tried to depose her boss and take over his role. She recalls what occurred, how in

one discussion about her whistleblowing action, her senior managers proposed a potential solution to the “dispute” – moving her boss to another role.

...it was considered that my boss could be moved to another position. Maybe it was bullshit, right, and they never intended to do so, but they told me so.

In response, Maria offered to take over his position if required.

So I said, “if my boss is repositioned, I am ready to take over his position”.

She describes what transpired:

So then they tell me I did all this [the whistleblowing] in order to take over his position, so here everyone is laughing. What is quite funny is that all this was written down in the dismissal letter, and so I counter the argument saying it's discriminatory, because I would like to know why I am the only employee, out of the 100 000 of the group, who cannot apply for a job internally. Because I did not say I want to take his position, I said “if he were to be repositioned, I am ready, with my 20 years of experience, to take over his position”.

Maria defended herself through the legal system. After 8 years of judicial procedures, her dismissal was overturned in court and she was vindicated.

In Maria's case, whistleblower reprisal took the form of negating and diminishing her position as a valid source of knowledge. Her senior boss remained “not worried” despite the evidence she provided, and later—during her dismissal—he called her a dishonest usurper. Both examples show how she is forced into erroneous positions—of unreliable, dishonest worker, a move aimed at either ensuring her silence or, if this did not work, ensuring she would be ignored. Jane experienced similar gaslighting, when told that colleagues' behavior was “not fraud... just good customer service”. Being abandoned by former allies like her boss who disowned her reinforced Jane's isolation. We see clearly the imposition of a normative regime via subtle, informal, violence that threatens one's intelligibility (Butler, 1990; Tyler, 2019), in these cases via whistleblower silencing and with maintaining the status quo as the ultimate outcome. A more formal, structural, imposition is also evident via practices of naming within these scenes of violence. A formal reason is required in order to dismiss a worker; in Maria's case, it was a cooked-up dishonesty charge, while in Jane's case, a mock “investigation” resulted in the accusation of “inappropriate and unprofessional behavior” and “poor judgment as a leader”. The outcome of these formal and structural practices of violence was to compound the women's positioning as questionable, suspicious figures. The naming practices legitimized and reinforced the more informal violence. We saw this clearly when Jane, having already been classed as a problematic individual, was explicitly treated as a dangerous person by the security guards monitoring her office door and waiting to escort her off the premises. The exercise of formal naming upholding violence was, in each case, elicited by the women's transgressive moves of continuing to speak up despite attempts to silence them. We saw similar dynamics in our other interviews, not included in this article for reasons of space.

3.2 | The specific other and the scene of address

When narrating their experiences, people continually reflected upon the positions taken by others who were directly involved in the violent categorizations making up whistleblower reprisals. Having won her whistleblower case, Jane recalls the day the ruling against her bank went public:

The first thing they [managers] did as soon as OSHA [the regulator] published that ruling, [Bank] came out and made a statement about how you know... I'm like... 'I was just a bad manager, I am some lone wolf'. Because what they do is they lie so much. And it's like... People will assume, 'Well, they are so

big they couldn't get away with a lie like that.' But they altered documents, from deposition to deposition, on me. I mean they do the most outrageous things and get away with it. It's horrific. So anyway. I get all like fired up when I talk about this.

Jane's bank had been formally investigated and many employees were fired or terminated. During this time the bank was sold to save its collapse. The new owners retained many of the senior managers that had overseen the fraudulent practices and the retaliation against whistleblowers like Jane. She reflected on why these individuals had been kept on:

Here's what I think: They needed to rebrand all those people that resigned or got fired, they needed somebody to rebrand them. They needed to grow it back, and they had a guy there who they knew was solid you know...who wouldn't, you know, reveal. Who would make sure that loans got booked regardless.

Maria also recalls her experience with a precise sense of the subject position of the boss, Francois, responsible for her exclusion, along with others in the department. She reflected on the position he was taking.

He is not stupid, he just embodies a specific mindset. It's just my opinion; he shows absolutely no compassion, no scruples. He is still working, and that is funny, because also from a more personal perspective.

Maria reflected on why her boss was acting in this way. She describes Francois's preference for hiring younger analysts, who were more malleable than older ones:

He wanted to hire young professionals who did not know the job of analyst, [upon] who could be imposed all of the bad decisions he wanted, even if these decisions would oppose the long-term interests of the bank... You feel that he has a pro-business behavior.

This mindset and behavior she describes are quite common within the bank, she notes:

There is now a pro-business stance in Risks departments, which indirectly puts pressure on analysts so they systematically give favorable, positive ratings. This ambient discourse pushes us, analysts, to always give favorable, positive ratings which please everyone. Any young recruit, who systematically gives favorable ratings without digging further, is shown as an example for his dynamism and efficiency.

Despite having borne such extreme exclusion and isolation, Maria offers insights into her boss's adopted subject position, his bias toward short-cuts, and preference for younger and more naïve recruits. She is sensitive to the wider culture, described as a "stance", an ambient discourse, and how it influences such decisions.

Maria went on to contrast his subject position to her own; being older and valuing the rules, she was compelled to oppose the pro-business stance.

So we would have talks on cases and I would tell him, "Sorry, I do not agree", I would say: "I am afraid this case is risky, on this aspect and that one." And he would say, "no, we will accept what they (the commercial team) ask for".

She recalls confronting her boss about his adopted position: was he a Risk Analyst or did he just adhere to the commercial interests of the bank?

And once I asked him, “But Yves, don’t you ever have second thoughts?”, and he answered “never”. Ok so, I get this, and it’s quite funny because someone who never has second thoughts... It’s impossible.

As well as adopting a firm stance, Maria describes becoming aware that her boss was someone who rarely questioned his own behavior. She began to see the flaws in this “impossible” way of working. She went on to theorize why this was:

Because at the end, when he was yelling at me, I saw his subconscious. He was not well, but he is convinced that, how to phrase this, he has a business mind, which means that it brings short-term profits, it’s a profit race, we are here to make money, so in a way his morale tells him I am the pain in the ass, and he is sure of that, he is intimately convinced of that, that I prevent from making more money.

Here, Maria describes her boss as deeply embedded in the cultural norms of new financial services culture. This shaped how he saw her.

For Maria, violent reprisal against her as whistleblower is made sense of in and through this scene of address. The organization, a faceless set of rules and structures, becomes manifest in this specific, immediate human figure in front of her: her boss Francois. The violence of being excluded as a whistleblower is inextricably linked to this dyadic scene of address: two people talking. In this moment, the “I” Maria understands herself to be, is inseparable from the “you” the other—Francois—in front of her. The “I”, she intuitively, is a “pain in the ass” to this other, hence the violent outbursts and yelling. Moreover, Maria understands this mode of address as shaped and produced by the specific world in which she sees Francois firmly located, with his “business mind” caught in the “profit race” that he refuses to question.

Reporting on her top boss’s response, Maria recalled how his inaction in relation to her reports meant that the wrongdoing would continue without being investigated:

If you don’t want the truth to appear, it’s quite easy, you just have to not move, not to delegate any investigation....

Here again, it was necessary for her—the discloser—to be framed in a particular way in order for this person to act, or in this case fail to act:

So, in such a situation, if you are [Name], you just don’t make a move and hope that the zealous employee will shut up!... My [top Director] decided to ignore my alert and did not launch any investigation.

Maria’s capacity to see herself as rigidly positioned within the dyad, in this case, as the “zealous employee” who will hopefully “shut up”, helps her to frame what is occurring and to make sense of the violent exclusions.

We saw similar for Jane; she theorizes that her depiction as “lone wolf” and “bad manager” is almost inevitable because of the “breeding” of a certain kind of subject that the system requires. A “solid guy” who would not reveal the fraud was needed instead. In Maria’s case, the mode of address similarly stems from a specific kind of corporate “breeding”: in which hiring young, naïve recruits on whom to impose self-defeating “bad decisions” and praise them for it was seen as “pro-business”. It seems that for Maria and Jane, understanding that their positioning as an excluded-whistleblower is occurring within a dyadic relation, in which the entire history and mindset of this other come to bear on the scene, helps them make sense of the force and violence of the moment.

When we are asked to account for our actions, we do not speak only for ourselves. The names we say we are, come from others, having a history and origin far beyond our own comprehension (Butler, 2005). As subjects we are

ontologically always “beyond ourselves” (Butler, 2004; Butler & Athanasiou, 2013), in this case, the perceived “self” exists within a relational dyad in which the positions of whistleblower, and manager/attacker, are mutually constitutive. In our respondents' accounts, we describe how they are named as excluded whistleblowers, but also how this name comes through the address of another, or group of others, shaped in and through those others' complex, layered experiences within and outside of financial services. These women are able to see the violence of the name imposed upon them as originating far outside the setting in which they find themselves, not simply with a single other but in a history and context that extends yet further beyond. Through this, they understood attempts at naming and excluding them to be flawed and shaky, built on falsehoods and a corrupt institutional landscape. Again, this position was strongly evident in other interviewees' responses, included in earlier versions of this article but omitted here for space.

3.3 | Troubling and injury

Our second theme described how interviewees were aware of the interpersonal, dyadic nature of the scene of violence. Following on from this, our third theme highlights the troubling of these positioning efforts that emerged in our interviewees' narratives. A sense of the farcical and the ridiculous marked their experiences of suffering and retaliation as a result of speaking out about wrongdoing. They frequently pointed to the absurdity emerging alongside the aggressive, attacking subject position that was adopted by colleagues and managers.

Maria recounted her isolation and harassment by her direct manager with some derision. She recalls one time when, as she sat at her desk, her boss stood directly in front of her, in an attempt to physically intimidate.

One time, he was yelling at me so much, he was there, standing upon me, and you know I was like, a bit phlegmatic, and I told him “Are you going to beat me, Yves?”

In her opinion, this episode shows how desperate her boss was to have her adopt his mindset, and the deficiency of this stance:

And you know, ha ha, it is almost funny but, I think it was also a hard time for him; being a harasser is also a hard position that you cannot keep for a long time, and I trust human beings, and I saw him stand back, he said “No, no, no, no, no, no”. And he left furious. He knew he could not do anything more. Because he could not beat me, huh.

In addition to showing insight into Yves's position, that “being a harasser is a hard position”, Maria creates an absurd scene out of this situation of violence and evident fear. She places this act of harassment—the physical intimidation and stance her manager had adopted—alongside a serious act of physical violence—beating—using parody. Recalling her question, “are you going to beat me Yves?”, escalates the event, in an ostensibly light-hearted way, so that it is implicitly contrasted with such a serious incident. In other parts of the interview, Maria emphasized how well she and Yves got along in other respects. Her description of her dismissal described above, is again presented as outlandish and somewhat bizarre: she is encouraged to make a statement, which is then treated as a joke by all present, but becomes part of the official record of the meeting and a reason to support her dismissal. She describes this Kafka-esque scene as “quite funny”.

This echoes Jane's recollection of her initial investigation into widespread fraud. Her manager, hearing that Jane's fraud department was planning to investigate serious breaches, warned his staff to watch out:

We came across an email from the regional manager...that went out to his, every employee in all of eight branches, saying 'hey, the fraud group is investigating us, don't put anything in writing. You would think that the correct behaviour for a regional manager would be to be aligning with the corporate

fraud group. To say, 'hey, if there are employees in my region committing fraud, I need to know about it.' Not going out and warning his employees and saying 'hey, they are onto us!' (laughs a little)

This sense of incredulity, which is strong enough to make her laugh even when describing painful and shocking details of her experience, was present throughout the interview. Jane contrasts the logical, rational behavior that might be expected from someone in her manager's position—to align with corporate fraud—with the actuality: extreme cover-up and collusion. Again, the original is placed alongside the parodic representation to highlight the extent of the wrongdoing.

As another example, Jane describes the retaliation experienced by a friend who had also spoken up.

...The same thing that they did to me they did to [name], the exact same thing. And even with her, they went to the extent of...They documented an interview with somebody who wasn't even there...who was on a cruise in the Mediterranean at the time! And they made up this investigation as soon as they got a letter from her lawyer: after they fired her but she refused to make changes to a due diligence document to [name of a bank].

Again, the level of reprisal was quite difficult to believe, not least the arrogance by which the managers willfully fabricated official information. Once more, a sense of incredulity emerges from the degree to which the actual behavior departs from the presumed rational, bureaucratic process of a formal investigation. Pointing out that the supposed interviewee was on "a cruise in the Mediterranean", and thus could not have been further away from the Boston office, underscores the difference between the formal process and actual practice and in this space lies space for farce and parody. The organization could not have acted in a more exaggerated, arrogant manner in their attempts to falsify evidence against her colleagues.

As Maria did, Jane laughs a lot during her interview, but at odd times. Interviewer Author 1 felt it was a cynical laughter, eliciting a sense that she remained shocked by the extreme and strange treatment she had received. The word "ridiculous" is repeated several times over. Her account appears to suggest that the level of wrongdoing, the impunity by which it was carried out, and the violence imposed upon her were certainly farcical. It was almost comical but not quite. Even as Jane appears to make fun of the impunity by which former colleagues fabricated an investigation into her colleague, the gravity of the situation and how it made her feel emerges:

I mean, they were just horrible, but they did the exact same thing [to me]. They just...they just made stuff up and they you know, issued this report and then they terminated her for being you know.... what's the word...venomous! (laughs). So, I mean, just ridiculous.

For Jane as for Maria, the aggressive positions adopted by former colleagues are at once funny, "just ridiculous", but also hurtful and "horrible". Jane searches before finding the word, "venomous", deploying it to show how, in the incongruity between the behavior of her colleagues and organizational norms of behavior, lies a kind of childish, vindictive response. This word, not normally found in organizational documents, shows the extreme level of violence and retaliation with which she was dealing.

For Maria too, the pain underlying the troubling and resistance remains evident in what she describes as "almost but not quite" funny. Earlier Maria noted that her boss Yves "is still working, and that is funny". She has been fired while he keeps his job; it is not actually amusing, it is simply ridiculous. Going on to describe her intimidation by Yves, while the scene is one of parody, and she appears intent on amusing the listener, she pulls back from fully naming it as humorous, noting instead "And you know, ha ha, it is almost funny but...". Maria explains how she achieved her aim in this scene—her boss backed away—but the wider landscape is one of isolation for her as whistleblower, while others in the organization continue as normal in some cases promoted. Throughout Maria's narrative, "almost but not quite funny" is evoked to describe ambivalence and incongruence. Strangeness is interlaced with hurt.

When these women say something is "funny", it is both amusing and not amusing at the same time: an incongruent situation that points to a deeper issue. They paint a picture in which they are forced into a place that is very

far from one's "normal" role within an organization. The "funny" refers to the odd, bizarre gap lying between these two imagined places. We see a "vacillation that occurs between the categories" as they are juxtaposed: a questioning of the taken for granted and a shift in the notion of what is possible (Butler, 1990: xxiii). Following on from our second theme, in which our interviewees expressed insight into the dyadic but also ek-static nature of the exclusion they experienced, thus rendering this exclusion "outside themselves" and making it easier to cope with, here we see the further troubling of reprisal acts, but through a kind of parody. The women's painful categorization by norms is unsettled by an attention to the incredulous and the odd. They trouble and destabilize the power of the normative apparatus causing violence with the aim of silencing whistleblowers.

Yet we also see clearly that this experience is not without another kind of trouble; the pain of exclusion and the suffering resulting from violence (see also Kenny, 2018; Lloyd, 2005). Maria and Jane each began their journey to disclosure as loyal, committed employees, but were forced to transgress norms of complicity and silence by speaking out, a process involving injury (Butler, 1997). The paradox inherent to "injurious interpellation" (Lloyd, 2005, p. 451) is such that the same traumatic desire for attachment that enables us to take a place in the social can also hurt us. We are "un-done" by needs for recognition: "the subject produces its coherence at the cost of its own complexity" (Butler, 1993, p. 115). From what we see here, we can reverse Butler's phrase: the whistleblowing subject produces its complexity—at the cost of its own coherence, in the eyes of the organization at least, and this was painful. In addition, material "trouble" attended these whistleblowers' disclosures resulting from dismissal and blacklisting, and lengthy, expensive legal cases.

4 | DISCUSSION

Our analysis integrated conceptual insights, iteratively developing our arguments as the article proceeded. We now bring these together to distill the contributions for extant debates.

4.1 | Aggression-troubling

Examining how workers deviating from norms of silence and complicity make sense of the scene, offers useful insight. We understand the interaction between whistleblowers and others exerting violence as a scene of categorization. In this scene, external ek-static elements come into play to shape how the whistleblower is perceived, perceives herself, and then troubles those perceptions. Moreover, in the process of giving an account, the worker appears to understand this ek-stasis to be the case, actively theorizing its presence in order to make sense of the "horror", in Jane's words, that can occur. Theoretical insights from Butler helped us to understand how workers' subjectivities exist in an ongoing state of "being in relation", a state enabling clarity and perspective but also tension and struggle against painful abjection (Butler, 2004, p. 19; Kenny & Fotaki, 2015).

We see how becoming "undone" through our attachments to others, particularly when this attachment gives rise to violence via naming, is not just a source of disorientation or discomfort. It can also usher in a chance to understand oneself differently. For our interviewees, accounting for oneself and the suffering experienced does not draw on a sense of a bounded, autonomous self. Relationality is always present: unavoidable, and intrinsic, and this is both a source of suffering but also an insight into survivability. For these workers, being in relation to the other means seeing how the other is also human, flawed, and troubled, and this appears to help people cope. Maria discussed her bosses' blind faith in a corrupt system, Jane reflected on colleagues beholden to mindless business practices designed to uphold the system.

Bringing these ideas together, we propose the concept of "aggression-troubling": a specific performative mode combining ontological vulnerability and troubling of norms. Aggression-troubling involves a specific movement within and without. The worker takes a deep dive into the scene of violence in order to temporarily take up the position of

the other who exerts it, then moves back out again, adopting a higher-level perspective on the situation as a whole, in order to parodically juxtapose it with bureaucratic normality. In this move, the violence is spotlighted and examined, and resulting from this, troubled. This framing is useful for helping us to see how people make sense of scenes of hurt, and gain a sense of, if not comfort, then perhaps some kind of peace.

This adds to theories of subjectivity drawing on Butler's work to highlight normative organizational violence and those subjected to it. Research examines how workers can be excluded because they transgress dominant norms, how they suffer from exclusion, and how organizational power structures enable this, whether in relation to gender, sexuality, age, speech acts, and forms of exploitation on the larger scale (Fotaki et al., 2014; Riach et al., 2014). Scholars show how excluded others resist by laying claim to exclusionary discourses, rewriting these and in so doing, lessening the injury imposed upon them. Adding to these debates, aggression-troubling brings together Butler's earlier work via her later work—as it were—in order to reignite her concern with “troubling” through a focus on ontological vulnerability. This is timely. While Butler's work has traditionally examined gender and sexuality, in recent years, she has extended this focus to different sites of inequality and suffering, including those relating to work and organizations (See Tyler, 2019 for discussion). Aggression-troubling shows us: the vulnerability and relationality attending scenes of organizational violence; how imposing ideals of what is “normal” come into play as part of that violence; and how these structures might be destabilized and disrupted—or troubled. Associated with this, we see how giving a retrospective account can enhance one's capacity to understand and possibly survive in this situation. We thus join others showing the promise of concepts of the mutual constitutiveness of ek-static self and other for our understanding of organizations (Fotaki & Harding, 2017; Tyler, 2019) and specifically, of speaking truth to power (Kenny, 2019), with aggression-troubling representing our first contribution to extant debates.

4.1.1 | Implications of aggression troubling: Making trouble for organizational complicity and silence

Building on our first contribution, aggression-troubling furthers the project of “making trouble” in cases where silence persists in the face of wrongdoing and suffering, and normative violence works to uphold this silence. Thus, it allows us to take the impetus from Butler's earlier work forward into new scenes, in which organizational and institutional structures take part in this silencing. Making trouble involves presenting situations of mundane violence as “almost but not quite funny”: as bizarre, parodic, and extreme representations of “business as usual”. By quizzically contrasting what is occurring, against regular expectations of organizational life, truth-tellers like our interviewees implicitly ask us to question, “is this normal?” (Butler, 1990), and “if not, why not?”. In so doing, they open the door for seeing the horror and violence of what is actually occurring and the overall impact of silencing.

Whistleblowing is one example of this kind of troublemaking. Our framing allows us to understand this practice as one in which the person gets themselves into trouble (becoming exposed to violence intent on silencing, for example). But critically, at the same time, it makes trouble for structures of power including organizational ones. Here for example, we saw how commonly accepted dimensions of the “new financial culture” were shown up for the problematic, violent apparatuses they are. We saw how the scaffolding underlying this culture is upheld by micro-level policing of norms and punishing truth-speech, and how this can turn violent. Going forward, applying the framework of aggression-troubling to other specific scenes of organizational troublemaking, we can begin to think how we take forward Butler's ideas into a new realm of vulnerability as part of organizational trouble-making.

4.2 | The specific “you”

Our second contribution is analytic. Understanding how the specific other comes to bear on scenes of normative violence is critical. We saw in our data the desire to narrate and understand what people had experienced and, as

part of that, to consider and retrospectively interrogate the “you” they encountered—the other by whom violence was experienced, and who was responsible for their attempted silencing via labelling, albeit in a flawed and sometimes “ridiculous” way. This “you” also formed part of their prior sense of belonging by having been a boss or a colleague and thus enjoying recognition. For Butler (2005), drawing on feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero but also Levinas and Laplanche, the presence of the specific “you” tends to be downplayed in our understanding of subjectivity formation (Butler, 2021). Instead the focus is on the bounded, autonomous “I”, or, moving beyond this, the “other” as a generalized collection of faceless selves (2005). Yet, the singular and immediate presence of the individual other-in-relation is a critical part of the experience of normative violence. We propose, adding to aggression-troubling, that the analysis of retrospective sense-making through “giving an account” is vital: analysis in which the account is viewed as intractably relational, and the dyadic scene of address by a significant, singular other, is foregrounded.

4.2.1 | Implications of the specific “you”: Specific scenes of whistleblower retaliation

A focus on the specific “you” furthers extant scholarship on whistleblower reprisal within business ethics and management and organization studies. This tends to assume employees adopt either a subject position of “suffering victim”, or in some cases, othering those who attack them. Research shows how the person suffering isolation can feel aggression toward the organization that is the cause of their suffering, and toward colleagues who do not speak out and thus remain protected while they are exposed (Devine & Maassarani, 2011; Kenny et al., 2019; Martin & Rifkin, 2004). This aggression can involve simplistic projections onto the organization and those working in it, as “all bad”. This is described as a necessary part of subjectivity—the definitive othering gives the whistleblower a stronger sense of who they are, and who they are becoming, through speaking truth to power (Kenny, 2019). It seems to us, however, that our interviewees go yet further: part of knowing “who one is” as an excluded whistleblower subject involves this deeper insight, seeing the others who attack as somewhat “readable”, flawed and human. They are weak but understandably so. Our interviewees show understanding of the other who is compelled into the cultural norm. Rather than this understanding somehow eroding their resolve to whistleblow and persist, it bolsters their capacity to do so. Our framing thus contributes to scholarship on whistleblowing in organizations. This helps us move beyond an almost-exclusive focus on retaliation and suffering. For practical purpose aggression-troubling contributes nuance in how whistleblowers' accounts are understood; this is important, given the recent focus by whistleblowing charities worldwide on providing psychosocial and counseling supports to help people cope with the aftermath of disclosure.

Finally, we acknowledge several limitations of this article. Our interviewees are women, but this does not lead us to argue that the framing emerging from these accounts is restricted to women whistleblowers (see Agostinho & Thylstrup, 2019; Alford, 2007, 2003; Miceli et al., 2012; Hunt, 2010; Rehg et al., 2008 for analysis of women whistleblowers' distinct experiences). Rather than distill unique features of women whistleblowers in financial services, we are interested in the play of power and aggression. This is of course intrinsically linked to how masculine and feminine subject positions emerge, are taken up or rejected, and how male and female bodies move between these (Butler, 1990, 2004; Kenny, 2019; Riach et al., 2016). Whistleblowing reprisal is, for example, underlaid by dynamics of aggression and resistance, which intersect with other flows of power in a given setting. Exposed and isolated whistleblowers, whether male, female, or non-binary, can be placed in positions of relative powerlessness by an aggressive organization bent on revenge (Contu, 2014; Maxwell, 2019), or indeed they can occupy an inexplicable and impossible position with regard to dominant organizational norms (Alford, 2001; Kenny, 2018). Future work will usefully build upon the notion of aggression-troubling with a more specific examination of gendered, and other, subject positions.

4.3 | Conclusion

Our article proposes aggression-troubling as a way to understand the aftermaths of various forms of organizational violence. Our insights were developed in relation to whistleblowing reprisals as acts of violence but the emergent

framing has wider use. Aggression-troubling is relevant for many kinds of disclosure, including cases of organizational discrimination, sexual harassment, and other scenes that attract normative violence designed at preventing speech. Future research will usefully examine new landscapes of making trouble through speech.

To be clear, we do not claim that a re-orientation on the part of the subject in relation to violence they experience, can easily overturn dominant organizational power structures. Troubling, as described here, does not necessarily alter the deeply-entrenched material conditions and long-held practices that uphold and support these structures (Mumby, 2005). At the same time, all our interviewees went on to win their legal cases and/or to draw public attention to the wrongdoing they encountered. This was not without pain as we saw. But in the case of financial services, reports from every major post-2008 inquiry into the crisis described how listening to whistleblowers would have prevented some of the worst excesses. Today across the world, new legislation supporting whistleblowers is being written to prevent or lessen future disasters. Alongside these moves, a deeper understanding of troubling, in both senses we examine, is clearly needed.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

We have no conflict of interests with this work.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

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