



December 15, 2025

IDGI-BC  
Conference Academic Committee  
"Beyond Content"

**Re: Submission of Conference Presentation Abstract**

To whom it may concern:

Please find below a submission for consideration for presentation "Power, Silence, and Psychological Safety in Higher Education".

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jason Walker'.

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**Program Director & Associate Professor**

Health and Wellness Psychology  
Industrial Organizational Psychology

## **Power, Silence, and Psychological Safety in Higher Education**

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Higher education institutions often champion ethics and progressivism as pillars of scholarship; however, beneath that narrative exists an uncomfortable truth - bullying, harassment, and psychological abuse are deeply entrenched in academic culture.

These behaviours are not isolated; they are woven into prestige-obsessed hierarchies that routinely shield the powerful from accountability. Drawing on *Shadows in the Ivory Tower: Confronting Workplace Violence in Academia*, this presentation highlights how power dynamics and a culture of silence can fuel workplace violence across faculty, staff, and students.

Bullying in higher education isn't new, and it rarely announces itself openly. It thrives through covert tactics: weaponized bureaucracy, exclusions from career advancement, retaliatory evaluation, and administrative indifference that leaves targets nowhere to turn. Robust structures within academia enable this toxicity—rank, title, and prestige shield perpetrators, fear keeps targets silent, and a culture of fear punishes anyone who dares speak up. For targets, the consequences are not abstract or minor: anxiety, depression, burnout, trauma-related symptoms, and, in the most extreme cases, suicide. These inherently toxic dynamics erode morale and productivity while driving talented individuals to suffer in silence, disengage, or leave.

Psychological safety is the line between harm and accountability. When speaking up feels like career suicide, fear wins, silence follows, and abuse thrives. Leaders who care more about weaponizing the mission to suit their needs or are fixated on institutional optics over accountability reinforce this silence, effectively normalizing a toxic culture.

This presentation rejects the framing of academic bullying as a personal or performance failure and instead positions it as a serious occupational and public health concern. It advances concrete, evidence-based solutions—trauma-informed leadership, transparent accountability, safe reporting pathways, and structural reforms that challenge entrenched power. Policy alone is insufficient. Cultural change is required—one that centers dignity, voice, and well-being as institutional obligations.