

Moving with affects in Finnish academia: Resistance practices of social science and humanities researchers and a possibility of change

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journals.sagepub.com/home/ecs**Tiina Suopajarvi** 

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Abstract

This article discusses the resistance practices of the social sciences and humanities researchers who are doing small-scale qualitative research in Finnish universities. The research material was generated in three online ‘cafés’ where 22 researchers from different academic career stages gathered to share and discuss their experiences and emotions related to both their everyday work and to the effects of current research strategies on their work. The social sciences and humanities researchers felt discomfort with current neoliberal science politics, but they must, to some extent, play by its rules. However, they have found different ways to resist them, too, and this study scrutinises what kinds of resistance practices were generated in the café encounters and, further, how affects became part of these practices. Through my analysis, anxiety, anger, pride and hope came into being as the most meaningful affects that circulated through the cafés, and which fostered the resistance practices. Furthermore, with these affects, academics move towards individual or collective, but sometimes ambiguously towards both of these ways of resisting. The individual way supports the neoliberal idea of competing individuals, whereas a more collective way can open a possibility for more substantial and rapid change.

Keywords

Academia, affect theory, ethnography, power relations, resistance, world cafe

Introduction

The focus of the main research strategies and big funding instruments that frame the work of Finnish academia is currently large-scale, multidisciplinary, research projects performed by large research groups. Furthermore, neoliberal ideology, managerialism

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and meritocracy prevail in Finnish universities (Kivistö et al., 2017; Nikunen, 2014; Ylijoki and Henriksson, 2017). In this article, I discuss how it feels to be a researcher in current academia, doing and wanting to do small-scale qualitative research in the social sciences and humanities (SSH), which is not multidisciplinary. The research material for our study was generated through three *Affect cafés*, which were held online by our research project on Academic Affects due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2021. In the cafés, 22 SSH researchers from all career stages (i.e. from doctoral students to full professors) gathered to discuss and share their experiences and emotions on everyday work lives in universities, as well as the effects of current research strategies on their work. The cafés lasted 1.5–2 hours and took place on Zoom, and the discussions were organised in groups of 3–4 participants.

While analysing how the researchers in the cafés discussed their work, organisations and work communities, I noticed the same ambiguity that had been mentioned in previous studies (e.g. Burford, 2017; Gill, 2009; Murray, 2018). Work situations are causing anxiety, yet researchers are highly motivated by their research and wish to stay in academia. In our cafés, this affective dilemma caused the participants to discuss how they could adapt to the requirements of universities and funding instruments while simultaneously resisting them. This dynamic is important since resistance is, to some degree, always constituted by the structures and systems it is targeting. On one hand, to be able to work and act within them, academics need to accept some rules; and on the other hand, to resist them, they need to have some kind of understanding of how the structures of the neoliberal university become formulated and how power works in its ruling relations. Thus, institutional power relations shape the practices of resistance (Lund and Tienari, 2019; Ortner, 1995). To scrutinise the resistance and its transformative potential, I looked at it as lived, embodied and gendered, yet becoming within, enabled or prevented, by its institutional contexts (Murray, 2018; Smidt et al., 2020). Resistance in academia has different kinds of forms: it can be, for example, individual or collective, mundane or organised, passive or active practices, and all of these simultaneously, which makes it a complex phenomenon (Anderson, 2008; Archer, 2008; Gill and Donaghue, 2016; Kalfa et al., 2018).

To get a grip on the complexity of resistance in academia, I analysed it through the lens of affect theory by following Sara Ahmed's (2014) notion that affects are a significant part of power relations and resistance. When affects circulate, such as during the café discussions on academia and academic work, they move us towards and/or away from each other. Through this movement, we leave impressions on each other, and through these impressions, our collective body starts to take shape (Ahmed, 2014: 44–45, 54). Ahmed's theory comes close to the way Charlotte Bloch (2012) has analysed emotions in academia: for Bloch, emotions are both structural and cultural, that is, her focus is on the interplay between individuals, structures, cultural norms and biological sensations. Although Bloch understood emotions as mediating between individuals and social realities, she did not talk about them as making realities, as Ahmed did. Nevertheless, I found it fruitful in my analysis, to discuss the feeling rules (culturally 'appropriate' emotions) and expression rules (culturally 'appropriate' emotional expression) (Hochschild, 1983) that Bloch used, to understand how the neoliberal university affects the emotional experiences related to research work. I argue that these rules also participate in the making of academic realities.

By sharing the emotional experiences of working in universities and doing research pertaining to (small) SSH disciplines during the cafés, the cultural affects started to become noticeable. Studying resistance practices by tracing affects offers a differently nuanced understanding of affective power relations in academia. With affect theory, I was able to look at resistance practices becoming simultaneously in the small individual expressions, in researchers' embodied and collective practices, and in the academic discourses that the researchers reflected in our cafés. In this way, for example, the practices that contained collective power yet felt very personal to the researchers, came into being. Following these theoretical understandings of the dynamics of resistance, my aim in this article is to study the following:

- What kinds of resistance practices were generated by SSH researchers in the café discussions?
- What affects do in/for these practices and in the dynamics of power and resistance? How do affects support and/or hamper collective efforts of resistance, or do they push researchers more towards individual resistance practices?

Academic work life has been studied from multiple perspectives, especially from the educational, sociological and (social) psychological perspectives. The anthropological perspective pertaining to everyday experiences was either missing or a more implicit part of prior studies, such as those of Science and technology studies scholar Oili-Helena Ylijoki (2019) on the happiness narrated by the academic elite in the United Kingdom. Autoethnographic methodology has proven especially useful in ethnographically oriented investigations into academia (e.g. Damsholt, 2013; Ehn and Löfgren, 2008; Foster, 2017). Likewise, affective studies of academic life are often based on researchers' own experiences or observations of their everyday lives (e.g. Gill, 2009; Mannevuola and Valovirta, 2019). Lund (2015) combined her ethnographic participatory observations (see Peacock, 2016) with interviews and university documents from Finnish university Aalto. In addition, affects in academic life have been studied through interviews (e.g. Ahmed, 2021; Cannizzo, 2018; Nikunen, 2014). Our affect cafés, where experiences of academic life were constructed cumulatively by sharing, add to the available methodologies for studying academic work, and my analysis with affects will contribute to the understanding of resistance in academia.

Power dynamics (in Finnish) academia as the context of the study

A contributor to the power dynamics in Finnish universities is that, although they are all public research and educational institutions, they were granted extensive autonomy through new legislation that passed in 2009. It made the universities financially more autonomous and simultaneously more responsible, where they were previously an accounting office of the state. This also meant rearrangements in the management by making those who represented other institutions in public or private sectors or in civic society considerable power players because they now made up at least 40 percent of the board. Prior to 2009, the board members came from the university community (Hallberg

et al., 2021). This meant that in neoliberal universities, power was reorganised; where individual professors were in strong power positions, power is currently concentrated in the hands of rectorates and boards (Locke et al., 2021; Morley, 2015).

Finland has actively neoliberalised its higher education sector, and today, its research funding system is globally one of the most competitive (Kivistö et al., 2017). Although neoliberalism in academia can have different meanings and consequences in different parts of the world, many people globally have experienced it as an increasing amount of precarisation and performance management, where every academic practice has become metricised in a way that translates into different forms of value (Burrows, 2012; Morley, 2015; Morley and Crossouard, 2016). These changes have been further experienced as making workplace cultures more toxic and unhealthy (Morley and Crossouard, 2016: 151). Rosalind Gill (2009: 236) argued that academics are ‘model neoliberal subjects’ due to their ability to engage in strict self-governance and continued that ‘the ‘freedom’, ‘flexibility’ and ‘autonomy’ as neoliberal forms of governmentality’ have in academia proven to be effective in making employees invest highly in work and working hours.

In neoliberal academia, each individual is expected to behave as an economic, rational actor, and the responsabilisation of the individual discourages collective social responsibility (Morley and Crossouard, 2016). At the same time, insecurity has become one of the ‘defining experiences of academic life’ (Gill and Donaghue, 2016: 92), which affects both those occupying precarious work conditions and those with more permanent posts. However, when considering the academic power dynamics, it must be acknowledged that working in academia is a harder job for some than for others, since ‘academic ideals and spaces are gendered, classed and raced’ (Murray, 2018: 164).

In everyday work life, too, many university employees are experiencing universities as becoming more and more hierarchical, and thus, they feel their ability to have an impact is decreasing. For example, from researchers’ perspective, power in university seems to be somewhere far away, like with University Rectors, who are unreachable for the employees due to their high hierarchical positions. When power is not clearly attached to someone in your work community, like your professor, it feels slippery, difficult to grasp and have an effect on. As Ahmed (2021) wrote, ‘Power works by making it hard to challenge how power works’ (p. 125). Challenging the prevailing power order is also difficult because it enables the practices and strengthens the positions of some people while degrading the work lives of others. The structures that support power order are invisible and therefore non-existent to those they are favourable to, whereas they become visible to those who do not fit into them, specifically those for whom the structures prevent them from going or being somewhere (Ahmed, 2021: 141–142; Murray, 2018).

Affect cafés as research materials

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our research project organised three Affect cafés through Zoom instead of doing corridor ethnography, as we had planned. These online meetings were based on the world café method where participants are divided into small groups that stay together throughout the discussions, while the facilitators move from one group to another (Lorenzetti et al., 2016). In our cafés, four researchers acted as facilitators, each with their own collectively pre-planned themes and questions. These

themes were (1) *research strategies*, specifically which and how they affect researchers' (everyday) work; (2) *emotions*, specifically what they are attached to in researchers' work and how they affect it; and (3) *everyday life* as a researcher as experienced and how it idealistically should be.

We organised 3 cafés with 22 participants. The small group or theme discussions lasted 20–30 minutes each. The cafés started with a joint introduction and ended with a joint discussion and the participants' reflections on the meeting. In Zoom sessions, participants were divided into several breakout rooms, and a host could move participants between rooms. Each participant could, of course, always leave their room or the whole session. While moving from one room and group to another, the facilitator briefly explained what the previous group(s) had discussed, and the next group could build on this or discuss a completely different topic. In this way, the knowledge generated would become cumulative. To start the joint end discussion, researchers asked the participants to consider what an emotionally sustainable university would be like. Each café was open for 1.5–2 hours, the meetings were video-recorded and the discussions were transcribed by professional transcribers.

To recruit people from different SSH disciplines, we organised the cafés as part of three national SSH seminars. Attending a café did not, however, require participation in the seminar, but we asked participants to enrol in the café beforehand. In addition to the seminar advertisements, we advertised the cafés through our own networks, which, as a result of the small scientific circles in Finland, led to situations in which many of the participants were colleagues or work acquaintances of the facilitators. In some of the small groups, the participants knew each other quite well, but in others, they were all meeting for the first time. This meant that in some groups, the affective intimacy was strong from the very beginning, but some level of intimacy came into being in all groups.

Online group discussions differ from offline discussions; the discussants mainly waited for their turn to speak, nodded and smiled to encourage each other or as a sign of agreement, but they seldom did this verbally. My colleagues Academic Affects analysed in detail how technology became an actor in our online café encounters. For example, to maintain the agreed schedule, the breakout rooms were closed in the middle of discussions; participants muted themselves when they were crying, and although we had a view of each participant's intimate settings, usually their homes, through their cameras, we did not see their bodies or sense them physically Academic Affects. In the conclusion, I will consider the effects of the online format on the knowledge produced in this study.

Although the invitation was open, only one man participated in the café, and all participants were white and had a Finnish background. Five held permanent contracts, seven held temporary contracts with universities and nine held a scholarship from a research foundation or were without funding. Their career stages varied from doctoral students (7) and postdoctoral researchers (10) to senior researchers or professors (5). Each faculty can decide whether a researcher working with a scholarship is entitled to have a desk and other infrastructure, such as an email address, and each discipline decides how well these researchers are included in everyday practices, such as meetings. Our participants represented seven universities and all worked in relatively small SSH disciplines, which means that there were 1–2 professors and 1–3 lecturers/teachers per discipline. Since the study participants represented small disciplines and were from a country with a small

population, I anonymised any identifiable personal information, such as their exact disciplinary backgrounds. The participants may, however, be able to identify each other.

Analysing resistance practices and affects

I have interpreted resistance both from the verbal expressions in the research material of the cafés and from the affects that circulated within the encounters that took place in the cafés. Nevertheless, these affects are tightly intertwined with the worlds outside of the cafés, in this case especially with the neoliberalism in universities, such as competition for funding and the concentration of power. Furthermore, work communities and networks, personal relationships with supervisors and isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on what kind of affective spaces the cafés were. The affect cafés as a research endeavour had aroused certain expectations that encouraged the participants to join us, and in the reflexive part at the end of each café, expressions like ‘empowering’, ‘much needed’ and ‘nervous about coming but happy that I did’ were used. Although there was sometimes a sense of haste, the cafés turned out to be quite intimate, allowing room for expressing many kinds of emotions, such as sadness through crying, joy through laughter and anger and disappointment through words.

Postqualitative scholar Maggie MacLure (2013a) encouraged researchers to ‘acknowledge those uncomfortable affects that swarm among our supposedly rational arguments’ (172). Emotional hotspots in the entanglement created by words, silences, sighs, laughter and crying glow for a reason, and it is our ethical obligation to follow them in our analysis (MacLure, 2013a). This does not erase the importance of language, as ‘language is in and of the body’ (MacLure, 2013b: 663), and the body can formulate, bend, prevent and extend the matter of language (Levy et al., 2015: 193). For example, laughter as an element of interaction can help us to talk about but also listen to difficult issues (Marander-Eklund, 2008). Therefore, my analysis of affects includes both the elements of language and embodied emotions as entangled together; in interpretations, spoken words and emotions are thus inseparable (see Beatty, 2010).

Therefore, in my analysis I have identified the practices of resistance both through what the participants said and through what kinds of affects were circulating during the discussion. In practice, I have read the transcriptions and watched the video-recordings of the cafés in order to identify the moments when the participants somehow express contrariness to the practices expected of those following neoliberal ideology in academia. In the next phase, I have interpreted them as forming more general practices of dodging, engaging in straightforward actions, doing small-scale SSH research and imagining new emotion rules. In the third phase, I have analysed how these practices intertwine with affects (Ahmed, 2014) and with the theory of resistance as collective and/or individual practice (e.g. Anderson, 2008). This means that in my analysis the research material and theories were in continuous dialogue. As a peer of the participants, my own bodily reactions both during the cafés and while reading, listening and noting the encounters that occurred during the cafés became part of the analysis (Timm Knudsen and Carsten, 2015: 5). Through this analysis, anxiety, anger, pride and hope came into being the most meaningful affects that circulated through the cafés. I then considered how they could foster the resistance practices I interpreted as the most meaningful.

Based on these analyses, I further assessed the transformative power of affect in resistance. In particular, anger as an emotion contributes to the possibility of change; when we are angry, we are open to a different kind of future (Ahmed, 2014: 171–172). James Burford (2017), however, criticised how the transformative nature of affect is assigned only to certain strong emotions, such as anger, rage and hope, arguing that we should also look at how other, more mundane emotions, such as feeling bad, ashamed or anxious, also make us do things in academia. Furthermore, we should analyse not only what makes us do things but also what blocks us from acting (Burford, 2017). When we start to feel hopeful, we can sense it in our bodies: they start to vibrate in anticipation of change (Ahmed, 2014: 184). Lund and Tienari (2019: 103) used the concept of *eros* to describe the energy needed to interrupt the neoliberal university. They wrote that *eros* as resistance ‘is about people’s conscious or unconscious disidentification with the way they are represented in the neoliberal university and about the attempts to articulate their work identity and practice in a way that displaces dominant representations’ (Lund and Tienari, 2019: 116).

Anxiety and anger in generating individual resistance practices

Anxiety circulated intensively in our cafés, and participants expressed it using both words and emotions, such as crying and showing empathy to displays of emotion. Anxiety was attached to the ongoing lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which intensified the feeling of loneliness among researchers Academic Affects. However, anxiety was more related to the precarious work conditions, competition, hierarchies and non-transparent decision-making of the universities in which the researchers worked. At the end of the cafés, the participants reflected on how meeting other researchers during the cafés had given them brief relief from lockdown anxiety, but to act against the more long-term reasons behind this affect, the participants had begun engaging in the practice of dodging in their work. Dodging in this case means avoiding situations that include a risk of negative affective intensities, but also trying not to think of the worst case scenario, like the end of funding. Dodging can be a conscious decision but can also happen unconsciously.

The researchers dodged to protect themselves from too heavy an emotional burden. They explained how these emotional loads often transferred from senior researchers and professors, teachers and supervisors to more junior researchers, especially doctoral students. The discussants had felt these burdens and reacted to them by consciously avoiding situations, such as official meetings, that could lead to conflicts or were anticipated to be full of emotional brooding. This practice of dodging, or avoidance as Kalfa et al. (2018) called it, helped researchers to keep focus on their work and to separate their personal and professional identities (Archer, 2008). By following Lund and Tienari’s (2019) idea of resistance as disidentification with the image of an ideal academic as someone who is constantly applying for (international) funding, submitting to (international) publications and talking about these, dodging can be seen as a practice of resistance (see Kalfa et al., 2018). However, this kind of resistance is ambiguous to the researchers, as Archer (2008) noticed in their study on younger academics’ professional identities that researchers do

not look far ahead but instead concentrate on the here and now to protect themselves from pressures of neoliberal academia, though they still feel this pressure. The following excerpt from our second café demonstrates the same ambiguity:

For me, it's periodical. It [anxiety] comes and goes, and I cannot see how this could continue well. Will I get funding or will I find a job after this? And what I've started to do is to push these thoughts away, and it scares me that I'm doing it because is it really good not to deal with these thoughts? I'd rather push them away and continue to work hard. I think it's scary that I do this. Is it too distressing and painful? Is that why I push them away? I don't yet have an answer to this question. (Doctoral student)

In the SSH fields in Finnish academia, PhD students have varying degrees of life experience since many of them start doctoral studies in their thirties or forties or even later. In the cafés, these researchers said that their previous work life and hobbies had, on one hand, 'thickened their skins', and on the other, given them skills to avoid unpleasant, overly emotional situations. Furthermore, working in another field before entering academia provided them with Plan B. This Plan B, as an individual resistance practice they relied on, could mean changing universities, research groups or supervisors or leaving academia altogether. It was constantly in the back of their minds, the discussants explained (see Smidt et al., 2020). In addition, some felt that their age protected them from having to constantly strive to become ideal neoliberal academics: they said that they were too old for the tenure-track system, so they did not have to compete for those positions. This form of resistance means trying to fit oneself into an organisation where things that are most highly valued, such as international research funding, are something these researchers are not even trying to attain. Although dodging might be considered as an effective resistance practice (see Anderson, 2008), it also shows how some people in academia need to choose to stay silent to continue their academic careers (see Murray, 2018).

In addition to the practices of dodging or engaging in academia differently as acts of resistance, the researchers described how they have taken straightforward actions. In our cafés, anger circulated, while some researchers discussed these actions. The anger was not shared in the same way as anxiety was, but it showed how some of the discussants used it to move away from those academic practices that were maintaining hierarchies and power relations. Similar to dodging, anger-induced actions were performed by individuals, and though their main efforts were to improve an individual's well-being and career opportunities, there were also some efforts to change the system. A postdoctoral researcher active in enhancing the well-being of young academics more generally described her most radical practice of resistance:

I walked into a meeting in which only those with at least the title of docent were invited to make a strategy for Academic Affects. I didn't even have a doctorate then, or maybe I had just received it. I don't remember. Although uninvited, I stubbornly walked into these meetings and demanded a turn to speak because the points of view of the doctoral students are important. And I got one sentence added to the strategy. I felt like, yay, I made an impact. (Postdoctoral researcher)

The tone of her voice made me, as a listener and fellow academic, sense that she had been angry at the time, and in the café, she was proud of her actions. Anger had made her act this way. Ahmed (2014) considered anger to be an important emotion in creating change. Being angry can provide energy that helps to imagine a different kind of world. We feel anger in our

bodies; it makes us shiver, sweat and tremble, and these are important sensations that allow the transition towards a different way of being (Ahmed, 2014: 175–176). Not being invited to participate in discussions and decision-making processes, despite feeling you belong at the table, can make you feel angry, and through this affective experience, the hierarchical structures of universities can become disclosed. However, the café discussants indicated that they mainly expected the ‘brave and stubborn’ individuals in their work communities to take these straightforward actions of resistance, but realised that it could become too exhausting for them (see Murray, 2018).

Anxiety and anger both generate practices of resistance in academia. Although anxiety mainly causes dodging, especially among more junior researchers, and anger leads to straightforward actions, they are both individual resistance practices. Researchers use dodging to be able to stay in academia, to secure their own careers and to protect themselves from the emotional burdens caused by the neoliberal ideal of competition (see Gill and Donaghue, 2016). Anger causes individuals to act, but the effects of these actions can either be individualistic, such as when someone leaves their university, or more collective. However, anger-driven resistance practices were rare in our café discussions, which the participants’ precarious or junior positions could explain, but the more senior participants never stressed this kind of action. Instead, they had tried to impact by, for example, criticising the strategies for increasing inequality. They were more disappointed than angry. Anxiety prevails in current academia (Burford, 2017; Morley and Crossouard, 2016), and this affective state supports neoliberal ideals by making academics protect their individual well-being to be able to continue with their work. Simultaneously, it prevents collective resistance practices that could boost change more substantially.

Epistemic pride generating collective, yet silent, resistance

Pride was an affect that circulated during our cafés. It was mainly attached to the ‘traditional’ way of doing research in the disciplines that our participants felt were important to continue. While they were affectively moved by pride, they were also moving away from current research strategies that focused on big multidisciplinary technology and innovation-oriented research themes. The researchers in our cafés said that they felt these strategies did not reflect their ideals and goals even though their own universities promoted them. Although we, as the facilitators of the cafés, did not define beforehand which strategies should be discussed together, university strategies and sometimes faculty strategies became the focus of cafés. Through its strategy, the university determines the ‘spearheads’ to which it is committed in external funding applications, and the strategy also dictates where some of the budgeted money is allocated. The strategy is not supposed to define all of the university’s research areas, but it was a powerful tool that was revealed to affect the sense of inclusion and exclusion during the café discussions. This verified the starting point of our project, namely, understanding research strategies as academic governing tools that generate emotional hot-spots (MacLure, 2013a).

The researchers agreed that university strategies are usually written in such a general terms level that most SSH researchers could adopt them, but they have found the increasing focus on the strategies to be alienating and excluding. This means that they are

expected to orient their research interests according to the strategy, though some of them had found that big multidisciplinary projects do not necessarily acknowledge the ethics of human sciences, for example. To succeed in qualitative, often ethnographic, studies, a long-term trustworthy relationship with study participants is required. Researchers must be highly motivated to pursue their research topic, since they need to put their emotions and personalities at stake in these kinds of research processes. The motivation to engage in their work, in often precarious positions, comes from their own research topic, which the café discussants could not see fitting into large-scale multi- or transdisciplinary research themes and groups. In other words, they did not want to become supporting actors in the technical or natural sciences:

I think for many researchers, their motivation for their work comes from their own background and what they're interested in. I think we have to ponder actually quite a lot how much we can do good research if the motivation comes from the outside. (Postdoctoral researcher)

Sticking with the topics in which the researchers are themselves actually interested is a practice of resistance in a neoliberal university. Although universities' strategies are not meant to be exclusive, studies have shown that management in Finnish universities is expecting SSH researchers to follow them by forming collaborative projects with the technical sciences (Hokka et al., 2023). The Finnish funding system, where private associations fund a substantial amount of research, especially the SSH fields (e.g. in 2020, one-fourth of all research costs in the humanities were funded by private actors) (Raivio et al., 2021), was appreciated by the café discussants. They considered these funds as a counterforce for universities, since some funds had even declared that they invest in research topics that are in the margins. On one hand, the funding offered as personal scholarships gives researchers independence from universities. On the other hand, this puts researchers in an ambiguous position: they are affiliated with a university or research institute, but they are often not considered as full members of their institutes or even their work communities. In addition, it keeps researchers in precarious positions. Nevertheless, the pride in doing research that feels right to them has affective power:

I'm doing research on something that I find interesting without thinking about whether it's important for the university or some other bigger context. And perhaps I use the kind of research methods, or things, that are not the most traditional ones; perhaps challenging and making things differently is part of who I am [with a laugh]. (Doctoral student)

Choosing not only the research topics but also the methods of generating research materials, analysis and writing, as well as the forms of publishing, are practices of resistance against high-speed, high-productive neoliberal universities (Anderson, 2008; Valovirta and Mannevu, 2022; Vostal, 2015). It is contradictory that the basic elements of research, especially for SSH disciplines formed around thick data and thick understanding, such as open, often long interviews or ethnography with long-term fieldwork and writing monographs, can now be described as resistant practices. The unease from not fitting into current university practices that our café discussants expressed not only in words but also by laughing and crying and by supporting and comforting each other is therefore understandable: they are doing what they have learned to do and value, but it is not good enough for their organisation. The epistemic premise that aims to better understand the world instead of offering quick solutions, was where these researchers stood firm. This conviction is difficult to change because it makes them proud of what they are doing. Living with the affective ambiguity stemming from anxiety and pride is energy consuming, but the most important thing for them is keeping their research identity and staying true to what science means to them:

Writing a monograph gives me the opportunity to develop a longer-term argument than an article would. That's why, from the reasons coming from my own discipline, but also for personal reasons, I want to write a second monograph. So, I've decided to do it, and it makes me feel a little bit sinful. (Senior researcher)

Our affect cafés were particularly attractive to researchers who felt that they were not included in the current research strategies of their own universities. They described that their choice to do research on 'small issues' using slow, qualitative methods is in the margins in neoliberal academia, and in the cafés, they met other researchers who shared their experiences. This resistance practice generated by pride and integrity is performed by individuals in their mundane work, but it is simultaneously active and collective yet unorganised. Consequently, it challenges studies of academic resistance that categorise resistance practices as either/or (e.g. Anderson, 2008; Kalfa et al., 2018). Moving with these affects means not only moving away from the neoliberal research strategies but also moving towards those who resist these strategies. Resistance can therefore be collective yet silent.

Hope for new emotion rules as a practice of collective resistance

The café discussions showed that universities are not currently a happy place for everyone (see Ylijoki, 2019). The affects – anxiety, anger, pride and especially hope – that circulated made the researchers ponder the possibility of change. For the participants, making academic work life better would require structural changes, such as secure work conditions with permanent contracts, but also the acknowledgement of the importance of emotions in academia. This would allow them to imagine changes in the everyday emotional practices in academic work. The researchers thus imagined how these new ways of understanding the importance of emotions and emotionally sustainable practices could become a collective practice of resistance. For them, they already existed on a small scale, but a real change calls for measures that are more substantial, as a postdoctoral researcher explained:

Facilitator: (. . .) How does your work community react to emotions? You seem to have a reaction to this [names one of the discussants]?

Postdoctoral researcher: [laughs] Yes, a reaction. In our discussion on strategy, we said quite many times that those over 50 aged geezers who are making the decisions get to tell other people in universities how to do things. And in some situations, they have an attitude, or the assumption is that they [emotions] are not part of the job or work community, which I think is unbelievable [with a laugh]. It's bullshit. Of course they are. But we should take a constructive approach so that things do and should feel something because if they don't, then they are not necessarily important. Having an emotional reaction means that for you, these things are meaningful.

According to the café discussions, certain 'feeling rules' prevail in universities. Sociologist Charlotte Bloch (2012) described these rules as 'emotions that the culture prescribes as appropriate to a given context' (10). For example, how should researchers feel when they receive negative funding decisions? According to critical studies on neoliberal universities, researchers should feel like losers in this situation (Morley and Crossouard, 2016). Our café participants said that they were allowed to feel disappointed, but simultaneously, they needed

to feel happy for those who were more successful. However, being happy for others becomes more and more difficult because everyone knows that due to competition, there are so many others who are not as lucky. The ‘expression rules’ (Bloch, 2012: 10) become affective when one needs to tone down or even hide the expressions of, for example, envy and joy. Norms and culture thus make a difference between what we ought to feel and what we really feel, as well as how we are supposed to express these feelings (Bloch, 2012: 10). Rethinking and challenging these rules can become a powerful resistance practice when, in contrast to the neoliberal competitive university’s expectations, we start to move towards instead of away from each other (Ahmed, 2014). A postdoctoral researcher in the café gave an example of how this could be done:

We should talk more about failures so that we’d accept them as part of this, like, if your article is rejected or you haven’t received funding or something like that, that we’d talk about those things as part of this job and that they don’t mean that you’re unsuitable for this career. That those feelings [of failure] are acceptable and a thing that is just part of this job. (Postdoctoral researcher)

The new emotional practices that the researchers were calling for to make a better university were first asking for and helping each other instead of competing against one another, as the neoliberal science policies are pushing us to do (see also Gill and Donaghue, 2016). Second, by giving positive feedback, especially more senior academics, like professors, could reinforce not only junior researchers’ but also postdoctoral and senior researchers’ sense of capability, since most of them work in precarious positions (see Burford, 2017). Due to this insecurity, third, the sense of inclusion, of being able to participate and have an impact, should be fostered by those who decide who are invited into meetings, planning and decision-making processes, as well as who receive information. This broader inclusiveness could deconstruct the hierarchies promoted by legislation and managerial organisations, our café participants argued. Although the researchers had experienced good selfless deeds done by their colleagues and were practicing these themselves, they called for broader solidarity all the way to leadership. These kinds of everyday emotional practices are meaningful in resistance, since trying to change structures is energy consuming and can feel inefficient in the short term (Ahmed, 2021; Burford, 2017).

In the cafés, the researchers criticised the neoliberal universities for engaging only with ‘top scholars’ and, in this way, enabling and sustaining structures that divide academics into ‘winners and losers’ (Morley and Crossouard, 2016). To universities, a top scholar is one who is successful in major funding competitions and who publishes prolifically in high-ranked international journals. In our cafés, the researchers imagined a university where all kinds of researchers would all be equally valued and where there would be permanent positions for ‘ordinary’ and ‘mediocre’ researchers, too. By ‘mediocre’, the discussants were referring to researchers who, for many reasons, were not striving to become a ‘top scholar’, and many of them identified with this image. An ideal university would allow space to conduct slow research (see Lund, 2015; Valovirta and Mannevu, 2022; Vostal, 2015). In this way, their own institutions would show the same kind of pride towards employees as the researchers themselves felt for their own ways of working. This would enhance the well-being of everyone:

I hope that there would be permanent jobs for mediocre researchers to do the middle-level basic jobs [laughs]. Because it does make you feel insecure that the future looks so unpredictable

because it's hard to see yourself . . . or any kind of future for yourself. But I'd love to see myself in a position of a mediocre person, researcher and employee. (Postdoctoral researcher)

(. . .)

The mediocrity you mentioned sounds like such a relief [laughs]. Slow and mediocre university [laughs] sounds really good, or a university where there's room for being slow and mediocre. Yes, please. (Doctoral student)

This kind of imagining is a resistance practice generated by hope, and I could see and feel how imagining an emotionally more sustainable future together made our participants visibly excited that a change would be possible. Only a small percentage of researchers can be top scholars, according to the definitions set by neoliberal universities. The constant striving to do more and more was causing bitterness, as a postdoctoral researcher who was trying to get into academic work after parental leave expressed. Although she had done every task that her employer had asked her to do, she felt left completely alone. The researchers argued that this change could happen only by challenging neoliberalism publicly as a collective, but they acknowledged that it is important to remember that the positions that academics are trying to 'rock the boat' from are different, and those who are in weak power positions are more vulnerable (see Murray, 2018). There are also academics who are happy with the current situation, who feel like 'winners' because of neoliberalism (Ylijoki, 2019), and dividing academics into winners and losers prevents the formation of the needed collective. The hope lies in emotional practices that are based on solidarity and require new emotion rules in academia.

Conclusion

This study reinforced the notion that working in a neoliberal university means that academics are affected by its ideas in many ways, which makes resisting neoliberal academia's ideals difficult (Gill, 2009; Lund and Tienari, 2019). Neoliberalism, managerialism and meritocracy prevail in Finnish society more generally, and academia as part of society is not exempt from these phenomena. Universities are, nevertheless, supposed to be institutions of critical thinking that can yield activism both inside and outside the academic world. Consequently, we are all neoliberal academics to some extent; we compete, we are satisfied when we get funding and perhaps happy that someone else does not, we boast about our publications on social media and we are envious of the constant successors (see Gill, 2009). This ambiguity affects the ideas and practices of resistance of SSH researchers; it makes them unhappy about the university as an institute and their employer, but they find enacting resistance publicly difficult and even dangerous for their academic careers. Consequently, to continue as scholars, they need to play by its rules, or at least appear to do so.

My analysis showed the meaningfulness of the circulation of affects in resistance practices and their effects. Anxiety and dodging can enable academics to move away from the collective and towards themselves, which strengthens the neoliberal idea of competition (see Gill and Donaghue, 2016). However, this moving away is complicated, since dodging can be the only known way to survive in academia, especially for those in precarious and hierarchically lower power positions (see Burford, 2017; Murray, 2018). In today's academia, even professors can feel powerless. Taking action and unfollowing

universities' strategies often requires some sort of anger, where our strong bodily emotions force us to act. With pride and hope, we move towards our colleagues and form a collective, and simultaneously, we move away from the forces of neoliberalism and meritocracy. Active practices of resistance maintain hope, and they also maintain the practices of resistance themselves. Taking time for slow thinking and writing, continuing to generate thick research materials and studying 'small issues' requires emotional work in today's academia and they have significant scientific impact on what we know of and how we understand the world.

Previous studies have shown (e.g. Anderson, 2008; Kalfa et al., 2018; Smidt et al., 2020) that there are subtle ways to enact resistance in academia. In my study, analysing resistance with affect theory showed the multifaceted, nuanced ways of expressing SSH researchers' need and desire to resist the current university, which they experienced as being too hierarchical, unequal and based on valuing mostly the quantity of publications, external funding and large-scale multidisciplinary projects, but also their fear and anxiety for resisting. The analysis generated 'small' everyday practices of resistance towards neoliberal academia as the most common, some of which were aimed to protect researchers themselves, some were collective and aimed for protecting their fields of science and the well-being of their work communities. Furthermore, and unlike previous studies, my analysis showed that resistance practices, in this case practices that followed from the epistemic pride and hope for changing the feeling and expression rules, can be both individual and collective: not following (all) rules of neoliberal academia feels like an individual act yet this could result in strong collective resistance. To be transformative, resistance practices thus need foremost to be public.

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