Science as an ‘object of love’ – affective milieus in the neoliberal university

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Abstract
This study examines the affective milieus in the neoliberal university. Previous studies have demonstrated that, despite harsh neoliberal realities, academics still express a love for academic work. This study uses love as its conceptual tool to analyse the different forms of love that academics attach to science. Drawing on Sara Ahmed’s theorisations of affect, this study shows that emotions play a crucial role in organising social order. Emotions work to divide academia into separate ingroups that have different visions of the virtues of science that represent the object of love for its proponents. While analysing higher education magazines with affective-discursive reading, the results of this study show that the neoliberal university favours the forms of love in which the individual ethos and competition are highly valued, while those forms of love that highlight collegial and emancipatory values are on trial. Overall, this study contributes to critical discussions of the neoliberal university by demonstrating the power of emotions in the construction of conflicting, intersecting and overlapping ways of othering and the complex assemblage of affective milieus that exist in today’s academia.

Keywords
Academics, affective milieus, affects, neoliberal university, professional higher education magazines

Introduction
Numerous studies have demonstrated that, despite the harsh material and emotional circumstances associated with the neoliberal university, academics express love for
In this study, I use love as a conceptual tool to profoundly investigate what different forms of love are attached to science. The impetus of this study is that, within academia, there are different understandings of the virtues of science involving questions of *why*, *how* and *for whom* science should be conducted. Academics have varying affectively charged incentives to pursue science. Drawing on Sara Ahmed (2014a) theorisations of affect, emotions play a crucial role in organising social order. Thus, emotions work to divide academia into separate ingroups that have different visions of the virtues of science that represent the object of love for its proponents.

The neoliberalisation of universities has profoundly influenced discursive and material realities and, consequently, academic identities, priorities and even knowledge itself (Morley, 2018). Universities no longer enjoy financial patronage from the state but are increasingly seen as ‘enterprises’ to be managed using business principles (Marginson and Considine, 2000). In European research policy agendas, the ‘impact’ of research is highlighted; this refers to the value that public investments in research generate in the form of scientific competitiveness and excellence, wealth creation, productivity and the social well-being of the country (Altbach and Salmi, 2011). Universities are steered by the government to foster close connections with business and industry (Bastow et al., 2014). Hence, the marketisation of the university sector has challenged the former academic and political ideas of science as a public good (Holmwood, 2019).

The adoption of the business-style managerial system, with its effectivity targets and ever-intensifying competition for resources and positions at all levels, has caused polarisation inside academia, which has had significant affective impacts. The increasing casualisation of academic labour seems to produce a binary of winners and losers, separating those who have and those who have not – a binary that is associated with pride, shame and anxiety (Morley and Crossouard, 2016). This polarisation is also evident at the disciplinary level, where the manifestations of research ‘impact’ and excellence have been more favourable for the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields than for social sciences and humanities (SSH) (Bastow et al., 2014). In previous literature, these tendencies have been said to cause malaise among academics, a condition characterised by negative conceptualisations of academia, such as ‘depressive complicity’ (Burrows, 2012), ‘a toxic culture’ (Smyth, 2018), ‘a depressed scene’ (Burford, 2015) and ‘hidden injuries’ (Gill, 2009). In addition, the collegiality and ethics of care have been eroded by a competitive, individualised culture (Lund and Tienari, 2019).

However, these analyses tend to provide only a one-dimensional picture, solely stressing the negative effects of the current changes and not indicating the myriad affects and nuances in the affective dynamics within academia. Academia is saturated with power struggles in which emotions play a crucial role. As the results of this study show, the power struggles over the virtues of science are embodied in affective articulations through which the different forms of love for science are cherished and sheltered against ‘others’ who are seen as a threat to this love. To capture these affective dynamics, I ask the following: What kinds of different forms of love are constructed through affective articulations? What kinds of ways of othering are employed to shelter each form of love? What kind of affective milieus do these forms of love construct in the neoliberal university? And finally: what do these milieus tell us about the power dynamics of academia?
The data I use to examine the affective milieus in the neoliberal academia are Finnish professional higher education magazines. Finland provides an interesting case: Having been a latecomer to the structural reforms in higher education (HE), Finland has become active in neoliberalising its university sector (Ylijoki, 2014) and, today, it has one of the most competitive funding systems in the world (De Boer et al., 2015). Previously, the Finnish HE system relied strongly on the Nordic ideal of equality in its policy discourse, but, recently, this has given way to the ideals of competition and efficiency (Pietilä, 2019).

In this mediatised contemporary culture, the analysis of affects and their significance in the formation of views among the public about politically and socially significant issues has gained significant interest (Venäläinen, 2022). Professional HE magazines are a core forum for Finnish academics in varying positions to write and express their opinions on science, academic life and science policy-related issues. They provide a rich source of information regarding academics’ views and experiences on the current state of academia, and they also contribute to constituting the social order in academia.

This paper will proceed as follows: Before presenting my findings, I will introduce the affective approach and analytical apparatus of the study. In the conclusion, I will elaborate on what the affective milieus tell us about the power dynamics in academia.

**Cultural politics of emotions: forming the affective milieus of academia**

To expose the affective milieus in academia, I rely on Ahmed’s (2014a) theorisations. For Ahmed, affects are cultural practices intertwined with discursive meaning-making. Thus, rather than residing in the subject, emotions play an integral role in organising social order, producing norms and establishing power relations. Emotions ‘stick’ to objects that are labelled as beneficial or harmful (Ahmed, 2014a: 14). In this case, a certain kind of science is represented as beneficial, that is, an object of love to be cherished. Those who share the same orientation towards an object form a group of ‘we’ (Ahmed, 2014a: 130). The narrative of ‘we’ entails that there are also ‘others’ whose presence is seen as a threat to the object of love. An affective narrative is manufactured in a way in which negative emotional readings towards ‘others’ work to bind ‘we’ as a collective of like-minded subjects (Ahmed, 2014a: 122–123). Overall, emotions work to signify individuals and collectives as morally good or bad or more valuable than others.

In this study, the shared insights of the virtues of science become an object of love that ‘we’, as an ingroup, strive to cherish and shelter. The different forms of love, with their affective articulations, form separate affective milieus. Kolehmainen and Mäkinen (2021) made a significant contribution to the affective approach with the concept of atmosphere, which leverages its ability to see the capitalisation of affect as a result of multiple atmospheres rather than a single, individual or clearly identified affect. Like atmospheres, affective milieus involve multiple emotions and are mutually constituted by the individual, collective and material elements (Schuetze, 2021). However, affective atmospheres are more concerned with the encounters between human and nonhuman bodies in situ, whereas affective milieus focus more broadly on the historical and social
structures and discourses behind affective articulations. Still, affective milieus are not static, because the various elements in the social scale and affective milieus constitute each other.

Ahmed (2014b) has also written about ‘atmospheric walls’ while illustrating the affective mechanism that prevents black bodies from entering the spaces dominated by white people. However, in this study, rather than the individual level, I am interested in emotions at the discursive level, because this enables capturing the extensive cultural and historical movements in academia.

Materials and methods

The data from this study consist of articles from three professional HE magazines: Acatiimi, Tiedepolitiikka (Science Policy) and Tieteessä Tapahduu (Science Now). In these magazines, academics in different positions and from different status groups (lectors, researchers, academic leaders, professors, doctoral researchers etc.) can write and share their opinions and experiences about academic life, science and science policy-related issues. They provide a core forum for Finnish academics to expose the feelings of injustice they have suffered: the anxieties, hopes or pleasures they have experienced, or the moral condemnation or admiration they attach to different aspects of academic life. Hence, they reflect the internal state of current academia and participate in constituting the social order in academia. Tiedepolitiikka (published by the Progressive Science Association) contains research-based reviews, contributions to current science policy issues and book reviews. Tieteessä Tapahduu (published by the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies) includes popular articles concerning current debates on science and science policy. Acatiimi, a periodical of three academic trade unions (the Finnish Union of University Professors, the Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers and the Union for University Teachers and Researchers in Finland), publishes articles on timely academia-related topics (such as labour market policy and recent science policy), as well as interviews, columns and opinion pieces.

The final corpus includes 110 articles (Acatiimi 69, Tiedepolitiikka 19 and Tieteessä Tapahduu 22). Because of the publishing frequency and number of articles printed per magazine, the total number of articles in each magazine differs in the dataset. Data have been drawn from a 3-year time span (2017–2019, because of a 2-year time lag in the online version of Tiedepolitiikka, 2016 is also included). During that time, the ruling centre-right government in Finland initiated major political interventions at the university level. Perhaps the most crucial intervention was the 900 million euros worth of budget cuts that led to layoffs and retrenchments in Finnish universities. These conditions served as critical points for academics and likely encouraged them to reflect on the greater purpose of academic work and their commitment to academia. Thus, this time span affords an interesting cultural, social and material backdrop to analyse the embodiment of the different forms of love.

Because I decided to work with an open mind to determine the emotional scene of the data as a whole, I applied a cyclical corpus-building method that aims to grasp the ‘discursive universe of the data’ (Maunter, 2017 (2008): 35). In cyclical corpus-building, data gathering and analysis alternate. First, to attain an initial understanding of the
various discourses, a small but relevant amount of data is collected and analysed. Second, the data gathering based on the preliminary analysis continues until the data no longer produce new representations (Maunter, 2017 (2008): 33–35).

In this study, the cyclical corpus-building process proceeded as follows. First, I scanned the first and last volumes of the entire time span for each journal. The purpose of this selective scanning was to distinguish emotional ‘hotspots’ (MacLure, 2013): the points that are clearly emotionally dense, paying attention, for instance, to a pathetic tone in the text, exaggerated expressions, juxtapositions and emotionally expressive verbs and adjectives. In this phase, I gathered articles (40 in total) and analysed them. Besides taking note of the emotionally expressive accounts, I also kept my eye on who or what was praised and who or what was presented as the culpable party. After reading and rereading the articles, I was able to identify that emotional hotspots are attached to two broad themes: (1) the relationship between university and government and (2) the internal relations of the university. Following this preliminary analysis, I selected more articles that included both or either of the above themes until the data reached saturation and the total number of articles was attained.

I analysed the selected articles through affective-discursive reading. This method focuses on culturally available forms of meaning-making through which some identities and communities are legitimised and reproduced using emotions (Ojala et al., 2019; Wetherell et al., 2015). In the analysis process, I examined the use of emotional language cues, rhetorical devices, such as metaphors, and the vocabulary and framing in texts that produce a certain kind of emotionally charged collective identity when discussing science and academia. Thereafter, I began to group the selected articles into entities that seemingly represented coherent, culturally available and recognisable forms of meaning-making – discourses in which different emotions were employed to (consciously or unconsciously) manifest certain virtues of science. These discourses represent forms of love. They are performative since they both generate their objects, and repeat past associations (Ahmed, 2014a: 194).

In the next sections, I will introduce four forms of love. I have named these discourses according to the key objects cherished and nurtured in each. For longer quotations, I have marked the journal, year and volume of publication. The names of the journals have been shortened, with TT referring to Tieteessä Tapahduu, TP to Tiedepolitiikka and ACA to Acatiimi. The quotes have been translated from Finnish to English.

**Love for strategic science**

In this form of love, academics enthuse about the changes that recent science policy reforms have afforded academia. The proponents of this love dedicate themselves to strategic science that will ensure economic growth and well-being at the individual, institutional and national level. Thus, they are fascinated by the competition and marketing principles that provide a dynamic ‘drive’ for academia. This form of love produces an overwhelming positive affective milieu that embodies its proponents’ enthusiastic manifestations on the construction of a new kind of dynamic university. This positivity, however, also involves reprimand for those ‘others’ who are not able or willing to participate in this project.
Mostly, the senior academics holding management positions stress the academic community’s need to adopt competition-driven practices so that the university will be at the cutting edge of global competition. This engagement of the academic community for compliance takes place through enthusiasm. The university rector and director of a research institute enthuse about the possibilities that profiling and the intensifying university-industry collaboration will bring:

As a result of skilfully profiled and open university, there will be open, global innovation platforms where research becomes elevated into new directions and research information will get new targets of applications. Globally impactful university brings vitality (while inducing talented people, enterprises and investments), and the local impact will be a way to produce relevant evidence of relevance and quality of university’s research and teaching. (TT 1/2018)

According to the authors, everything ‘new’ will arise from the marketisation that incites international and multidisciplinary science. As a result, there will be applications and innovations for business and industry, which will allow the university and the whole nation to thrive. The university managers foresee a bright future for the university organisation and the community as a whole, if everyone is only committed to following the marketing principles. Overall, the positively charged expressions that frequently employ the use of positive verbs such as ‘liberate’ and ‘open up’, combined with the optimistic orientation for the future, work as rhetorical cues that urge academics to believe in the bliss of strategic science.

According to the proponents of this love, the engagement of strategic science calls for profound structural change. Universities should rid themselves of the old structures and institutional boundaries, because they work as a hindrance to economic growth: ‘At present, we are working with yesterday’s operation models, which do not produce optimal resource efficiency’ (ACA, 5/2017). However, eschewing the old structures is not easy, because the old habits and values are deep-rooted: ‘The current situation that can be paradoxically characterised as the juxtaposition between the rhetorical modernisation and structural perseverance’ (TT, 3/2019) seems to be tiresome for the academics of this ingroup. Besides the fact that the university should operate more flexibly, the traditional academic elements should be shaken. As the university manager and the director of the research institute argue, ‘seizing a new opportunity requires small and big changes for the academic community’ and ‘changes in attitudes’ (TT, 1/2018). By this, the managers hint that there are those academics who are reluctant to exchange their habits for those better suited to the needs of marketised university; this needs to change.

However, compliance is not enough: academics should also express enthusiasm towards the marketing principles. As the director of the junior research association declares, ‘“Researchers, go digital, make videos, show the world what you have done!” Weber excited the audience’ (ACA, 4/2018). Regarding happiness, Ahmed (2010) suggests that there is a ‘happiness script’, according to which happiness is considered a social good. Happiness signifies that subjects are oriented in the right way; they are in line and act according to norms. Thus, enthusiasm seems to represent a feeling that works to steer academics to act in the proper way.

This change that academia should experience also encompasses academic identity. This new identity should be vigilant in creating international and transinstitutional
networks and marketising research work in social media platforms – to ‘have skills to be in the limelight in social media’ (ACA, 4/2018). As a professor of journalism states: ‘Imposing the facts is not enough, but researchers must put their communication skills and emotions at stake’ (ACA, 4/2017). This discourse exemplifies the ideal academic, who is multiskilled, able to react flexibly to changing conditions and make use of the opportunities that the marketised university offers (Lund and Tienari, 2019). Specifically, junior academics seem to display this kind of dynamism or, at least, have the best potential to be modified as such, as the director of the youth science academy comments:

We want to challenge the narrow conceptions of researchers inside and outside university. The ideas of researchers’ dens, ivory towers and lazy-bone researchers are ready for the scrap heap. Researchers, especially the younger ones, are international, multidisciplinary and ready to discuss their research with primary school pupils, as well as the members of Parliament. (ACA, 4/2018)

Again, the director’s vigour and determined rhetorical cues hint that those included in ‘we’ are the ones who fit into the ideal figure. The author seems to implicitly suggest that the junior academics who represent the new research generation that is international, multidisciplinary and communicative are completely different from the former generation. As a result, the former generation is presented as the ‘others’, who are lazy, mono-disciplinary and nationally oriented, and thus, the very representation of the prejudices that are aimed at researchers outside academia.

This division between the old and new generation suggests that the scholars who refuse to alter their academic behaviour are excluded from the ingroup of strategic science. These ‘old-time’ scholars are associated with reactionism and egoism, as they ignore socio-political needs and only concentrate on curiosity-based research. This categorisation of these scholars is evident from the following extract:

Researchers have to look in the mirror. Maybe people became accustomed to a situation where the state gives cash and researchers research. Now, one must earn the legitimacy to do research in a new way – and that has to be done every day. (ACA, 4/2017)

This author rebukes these ‘others’, curtly telling them to ‘look in the mirror’ and commanding them to ‘earn their legitimacy to do research’. By referring to the past (‘state gives cash and researchers research’), the author provokes an image of a scholar who refuses to realise that the times have changed. The state does not invest generous funding in universities anymore without requiring the social impact of science in return. Instead of doing utility research, these scholars are hiding in their ivory towers. The author is seemingly annoyed with them because they stubbornly hold on to the past and, thus, do not commit themselves to the practices of strategic science.

The figure of the ‘other’ is especially associated with SSH researchers, who are entwined in the criticism of and opposition to ongoing changes. In particular, the humanities are advised to ‘get out of their dens’ (ACA, 1/2017) to gain legitimacy. Overall, in expressing normative framings as ‘musts’ or ‘shoulds’, the authors in this form of love formulate a gap between what is desired (everyone should engage in pursuing strategic science) and what is occurring (the obstructive ‘others’ misbehave by showing negative feelings and a critical stance).
To conclude, in this affective milieu, love is aimed at strategic science. In this future-oriented form of love, positivity indicates that the current socio-material conditions of academia are favourable for this love. At the same time, positivity works as an impetus for academics to comply with neoliberal principles.

**Love for holy science**

In this discourse, science is represented as holy, and its divine essence is cherished as the object of love. Science is illustrated as ‘the greatest achievement of mankind’ that has brought humanity ‘from the shadows into the light’. The proponents of this love produce an affective milieu of pride that constitute a narration of the transcendental and auratic essence of science. The expressions among the proponents of this form of love manifest: ‘Science lightens brightly’ (TT, 5/2019), ‘Education is as sun for expelled’ (TP, 4/2016) or ‘Science is one of the greatest institutions in mankind’ (TT, 5/2019). In addition, the narrations regarding the ‘gallant history of science’ reproduce this sense of pride:

> In one sense, parallels can be drawn between a hired army and a university. Personally, I am proud and grateful that I have been given the opportunity to walk a few modest steps with this army in which Galileo and Newton, as well as Thomas Aquinas, Charles Darwin, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, were marching. (TT, 6/2017)

By enumerating famous philosophers, biologists and physicists, the writer positions himself as a proponent of ‘an old academic elite’, or a scholar from the ‘high-culture sciences’ (Porter, 2012: 210). The analogy between scholars and hired armies works to produce a conception of the academic as a mercenary who serves the university by virtue of his (rarely her) interests, without ideological, political or national motives. The university’s lofty history and status as an elite institution is represented in the reports that present the long-lasting traditions of the university: ceremonious evening galas, arranged in connection with university conferences and happenings, that follow the academic traditions with classical music performances and ‘speeches for science, art, professors and universities’ (ACA, 7/2019).

However, it becomes evident that politicians and society, with their demands and expectations towards science, threaten the ideal of lofty science. The author, who in the previous extract declared his pride in being part of the hired army of famous scholars, continues:

> We all know that universities across the world are in trouble. The establishment couldn’t help keeping their hands off our army. [. . .] The university is a symbol. It symbolises people’s search for truth. [. . .] We shall battle and defend the university, and we must never surrender. (TT, 6/2017)

With the use of military rhetoric, the writer agitates scholars to fight for the glory of the university against the ‘others’: the political decision-makers ‘picking on’ academia and disturbing the exalted work of scholars. This discourse employs masculinised military rhetoric – which draws from the ancient times of the university institution (Koski, 1993) – according to which, science should deliver ‘a counterstroke’ (TT, 5/2019); academics
‘must stand firmly behind science’ (ACA, 1/2018) or the humanities should ‘make a counterattack against science policy’ (TP, 4/2016). These expressions employ defiant affective articulations that strive to defend science’s position as an autonomous enterprise.

The proponents of this form of love respond with arrogance and defiance to politicians’ interventions in science and strive to show the superiority of academics to politicians. Politicians’ comprehension of science is said to be ‘at the level of the café cum laude’. In Finnish, ‘café cum laude’ (kuppilan cum laude) refers to quasi-scientific chatting in the cafeteria. While reporting on a panel discussion concerning ‘Science’s utility or worth’, Acatiimi illustrate how a professor of astronomy ‘related some tragicomic examples of how university told astrophysics to focus on the ageing of population since it is a hard currency nowadays’ (1/2019). In searching for economic profits or rapid solutions to wicked problems, the stakeholders who are investing in the applied research are ‘shooting themselves in the foot’ (ACA, 4/2019) by not understanding the comprehensive value of basic research and the amount of time it requires to develop.

It becomes evident that, to regain its status as an elite institution, academia should be reserved for the most talented academics who are unconditionally committed to science. As a professor of philosophy states, the ‘researcher-teacher pursues their vocation, financial compensation is less important’ (TP, 2/2018) – a statement that suggests that academics should not be concerned about wages and financial rewards, because a ‘real’ academic is doing their work out of sheer passion (Cannizzo, 2018). Also, the difficulty of scientific work is emphasised to highlight the importance of researchers’ individual skills:

Science is a difficult brand. Not everyone is ever able to master the scientific method. However, admitting this is difficult. Finland is a great nation of education, and the Ministry of Education plans to expand undergraduate training. This means that there will be a great number of students who do not learn to master scientific research. (ACA, 2/2018)

According to this author, the Ministry of Education’s equality targets are paradoxical because they will lead to a situation where there are masses of students, many of whom are untalented and will graduate with poor intellectual skills. By bringing all kinds of students and academics into academia, the mass university systems will inevitably import the ‘others’, that is, the ‘mediocre’ individuals who do not bear a special kind of talent and devotion to science. In this way, these ‘others’ are dimming the auratic light of science and threatening the elite status of university institution. The professor’s statement could be interpreted as a mobilisation of conventional class-based disdain – aristocratic fear of the incursion of ‘the masses’ who will pollute the purity of the university institution (Leathwood and Hey, 2009).

In sum, in this affective milieu, love is aimed at holy science. Pride works in cherishing science’s transcendentality and sheltering the university’s position as an elite institution where individual talent and the unconditional devotion to science is highly valued.

**Love for emancipatory science**

In the love for emancipatory science, academics are attached to the science that increases people’s well-being and level of awareness and, simultaneously, supports democracy and
human values. The prior culture in academia acknowledged these values, but now, in the current marketised university, these values have long gone. Therefore, the affective milieu of this love is surrounded by despair. The proponents of this love sense that the socio-material conditions of the neoliberal university leave little space for emancipatory endeavours, which is why their love has been brought into question. One reason for this is the prevailing funding formula and merit system:

When researchers really communicate with society—by engaging in politics, giving lectures in the adult education centres and writing popular articles and non-fiction books—it is a total waste of time because one cannot receive the points that advance a career but often only criticism if one writes in Finnish where *Inglish* [mocking expression for English language] seems to be the dominant language. (ACA, 8/2018)

The author expresses his frustration and sorrow towards the conditions where, despite the fact that the Ministry of Education and Culture trumpets the need for a social impact of research, the funding system does not support the educational impact for lay people. Emancipatory objectives would call for the distribution of knowledge to common people in their native language through monographs and texts in popular outlets, but the system rewards publishing only in the top international journals for the academic community. This paradox concerns especially the SSH fields because, for them, publishing in the native language has been typical.

However, the problem does not lie solely within the reward system but on marketisation as a whole, which is evident in this cultural researcher’s account:

Universities’ mission is not to create a world where academics sell themselves in terms of platform economy, since otherwise ‘university sacrifices its autonomy, identity and educational mission with mortal consequences’. (ACA, 6/2017)

The author’s tone is gloomy. If academia submits itself to markets, then the universities’ autonomy, identity and mission will be lost. Some academics believe that the situation has already gotten out of hand: ‘The power of the owners of factories has moved to global markets—not to universities’ (ACA, 8/2018), and there is nothing that can be done to change this.

One group to blame for the marketisation of academia is that of the external transnational and national steering organisations, such as the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). In the following extract, a social scientist who has left academia describes her past experiences:

Hype and excellence discourse are certainly not valuable. They cause me physical nausea. No more reforms from the Ministry of Education. No more honey-coated reports for the experts in OECD. (TP, 2/2016)

A strong affective expression of nausea is deployed to indicate a moral condemnation of the market-driven discourses of ‘excellence’ and ‘hype’. Excellence is associated with something that may be served in a nice package (‘honey-coated reports’) but does not contain real content. Thus, the marketised university forces academics to produce
superficial ‘fluff’ to make things ‘look good’. Simultaneously, the proponents of this love present themselves as critical intellectuals who focus on producing in-depth knowledge, in contrast to those ‘others’ who comply with performance expectations. These ‘others’ are presented as immoral because they behave opportunistically and do not bother to consider the common good in- and outside of academia. In the following extract, the author’s description of the changes that the figure of the ideal professor has undergone during recent decades highlights this juxtaposition:

Previously, professors, while aiming at pursuing the ideals of the education university, also educated people. Today, a real hero is the cosmopolitan who gets money from the EU, is market-oriented, works in the centre of excellence and who succeeds in international grant proposals and achieves the number of publications in journals classified as ‘top’. (TT, 2/2019)

Past professors are illustrated as those who acted altruistically in pursuing the long-term development of science and educating people. In describing the ideal professor of today as ‘a real hero’ and questioning top research with quotation marks, irony is employed to indicate the ‘other’, who concentrates only on fulfilling the given criteria. Unlike these ‘others’, the ideal academic is the kind who pursues good academic citizenship, takes care of colleagues and students and is also liable to the wider public (Macfarlane, 2005).

In a similar way, the professor of sociology, by sharing his instructions for junior academics on how to succeed in current academia (ACA, 4/2019), employs irony in illustrating the ideal academic of a neoliberal university. The instructions involve advice such as ‘publish the same results with different headlines in different scientific journals’ to maximise publication rates, or ‘concentrate solely on publishing’ instead of teaching, administration and social interaction, because ‘these activities take too much time but do not enhance merit’. This advice resembles Davies and Petersen’s (2005) scenario of ‘spoilt’ academic subjectivities: the perils of the new managerialism who ‘strive to produce the products desired by government but who are at risk of losing the capacity to fulfil the desire to carry out significant creative or critical intellectual work’ (p. 78). In this sense, it seems that, according to the proponents of this love, individual opportunism will have fatal consequences for academic work because it ruins intellectualism in academia.

In this affective milieu, love is attached to the past, to the lost object. Thus, this form of love is surrounded by despair, highlighting that the love of this ingroup is on trial. In employing irony, the proponents of this form of love strive to defend the pieces of emancipatory science that are left.

**Love for socially sustainable science**

This discourse involves a love for socially sustainable science. The rationale behind this discourse is that, without the practical work of the local academic community, there would be no university, education or science. Science should be produced without the exploitation of university workers and without compromising humane conditions. Thus, the well-being of academic labour is equated with the sustainability and regeneration of
science. However, it becomes evident that, according to the ingroup of this form of love, the prevailing managerial practices have made current academia a cold, harsh and heartless place in which to work. Under these conditions, practicing this love has become hard, and bitterness characterises the affective milieu of this love.

The affective formations in this discourse produce an image of reciprocal distrust and enmity between academics and the university government. In the following extract, the author is seemingly offended by the resource cuts implemented by the government:

We are experts, professionals, scientists and even human beings. We are not euros; education and knowledge are not a drain of cash for national economy but the starting point for everything, the point in which success is based on. (ACA, 7/2019)

The author indicates academics’ awareness of the unfair treatment by the government towards them and, simultaneously, attempts to increase academics’ dignity. The author may also be addressing the government officials and, in a polemic way, trying to point out their wrongdoings. It is said that the Finnish government ‘has constantly broken its promises of the steady budgeting of universities’; as a result, ‘risks tend to flow into short-term workers, and short-termism is the root for other problems’ (ACA, 4/2017). In addition, by enacting a law that changed Finnish universities from state-budgeting bureaucracies into independent corporations and changed the status of academic staff members from civil servants regulated by public law to (private) employees, the Finnish government has made academics’ working conditions insecure and precarious.

By claiming better working conditions (better salaries and better working contracts with their ‘fists clenched’), this love employs the trade union discourse to portray an image of ‘we’ as academic precariat fighting against the university managers envisioned as the employer party. Managers as ‘others’ have ‘barricaded themselves to make decisions about the university’ (ACA, 5/2017). They ‘avoid negotiation’ and practice ‘quasi-democracy’. These affective narrations produce a gulf between the managers and managed academics. The managers’ unwillingness to hear the academic workers is seen as extremely disrespectful:

The establishment of the new university was an undemocratic process. It caused traumas that won’t be healed with the consultant firms’ positive psychology. With the superimposed demand for positivity, managers infantilise the committed experts. It seems like symbolic violence under the conditions where most of the academic staff have short-term contracts. (TP, 2/2019)

The author is dissatisfied with the way university managers handled the organisational change. By using strong rhetorical expressions, such as ‘trauma’ and ‘symbolic violence’, the author emphasise that the managers’ acts have invaded the ‘body’ of the local academic community and caused pain.

The bitterness against university managers and the Finnish government, however, also works to strengthen the dignity among those considered to be a part of ‘we’. While threatening the Finnish government with the ‘brain drain’, the proponents of this love declare that not only will the nation lose ‘its highly educated experts’, but there will be a great number of skilled experts leaving the country. This indicates that ‘we are many’ and
‘we are the mass’, and thus, ‘our’ statements cannot be passed. The dignity of academic workers becomes also visible in this lector’s account, where he emphasises that even the managerial tendencies cannot reduce the good spirit of the academic community:

Despite everything, university is still one of the best workplaces. It is privilege to work with people who are committed, skilled, talented and cooperative. (TP, 2/2019)

With its manifestations of the equal treatment of academics, this form of love distance itself from those forms according to which university should invest in only the most talented scholars. In addition, the proponents of this love strive to remove the mystifying aura surrounding scholarly work by highlighting that research work is ‘a job like many others’. Academic work may be a vocation for some, but for most, the relation to academic work is more mundane: the ‘researcher must be able to provide herself and her dependents, but work is becoming ever precarious’ (TP, 1/2019). The figure of the traditional academic who does her or his work out of sheer passion is seen as a damaging cultural construction that enables the poor working conditions to continue. Thus, the ingroup of this form of love present ideals that contradict those who advocate the holiness of science and require unconditional devotion to it.

The government’s acts regarding stringent competition are seen as generating a ‘diseased’ milieu where ‘problems with coping, motivation, or with other persons are personalised as the individual’s own faults and weaknesses’ (ACA, 2/2017). This manifestation echoes the same causes of individualisation, as highlighted by Gill and Donaghue (2016), according to whom, the individualist framework of neoliberal academia renders social and political issues into matters of individual success or failure. Individualism cultivates the values of the ‘others’: opportunistic academics who are ‘arrogant’, ‘self-important’ or ‘rude to the students’ because ‘the excellent researcher has no time to profile anything else than to meet their own incentives’ (TP, 2/2016). These articulations signify the ‘we’ as morally and ethically superior to the neoliberal ‘others’. While promoting an individualistic ethos, neoliberalism is seen to erode the ethics of care and collegiality in academia.

This form of love produces an affective milieu of bitterness, because managerialisation and the neoliberal doctrine are damaging the social sustainability of science. Regardless, this bitterness works to encourage and construct a self-dignity among this ingroup and, thus, to protect their object of love.

**Conclusion**

Previous studies have demonstrated that neoliberalism has caused an affective malaise in academia (Burford, 2015; Burrows, 2012; Gill, 2009; Smyth, 2018). The results of this study, however, show that academia is not solely penetrated by the depressive affective milieu, but consists of multiple affective milieus, some of which are positively charged. With their enthusiasm and excitement, especially the advocates of strategic science, prove that ‘not all are doom-laden about the future and romanticise the past’ (Clarke et al., 2012: 13). Above all, the existence of the multitude of these affective milieus demonstrates that, for some ingroups, the neoliberal university provides conditions where
their love can flourish, whereas, for other ingroups, it forms a narrow frame, leaving little space for them to pursue their love.

The emotions in each form of love constitute a negative or positive stance on the structural reforms of the university, depending on what kind of effects they have on the object of love. Each form represents a particular standpoint in science policy or the historical tendencies in the science-state relationship. The ingroup of love for strategic science celebrates science policy implementations that have urged universities to act as enterprises and academics as entrepreneurs, since these acts will ensure ‘drive’ and the innovative relationship between university research and industry. The arrogance directed against the political decision-makers in the love for holy science, by contrast, echoes the ever-present tensions between the university and those in power (Välimaa, 2015) and embodies academics’ willingness to maintain the university’s status as an elite institution. Despair and a nostalgic regard for the past among the ingroup of love for emancipatory science, find its correspondence with the historical analysis of the science policy paradigms. According to these analyses, the science policy in the 1970s aimed to develop ‘democratic welfare states’ within the conduct of social sciences but later on these aims had to give way to agendas that view science as a crucial player in constructing national innovation systems (Kaukonen and Nieminen, 1999). The bitterness among the ingroup of the love for socially sustainable science opposes the increasing casualisation of academic labour and managerialism (Winter, 2009). Just as in Kolehmainen and Mäkinen’s (2021) study that highlights the co-productive process of creating atmospheres, affective milieus are also coproduced by academics and the elements of the social scale. However, when atmospheres are strictly limited to the encounters between human and nonhuman bodies in situ, the affective milieus may account for the broader historical, political, institutional and social discourses that are intertwined with the affective formations.

In addition, these affective milieus demonstrate the power dynamics within academia that are indisputably intermingled with science policy changes. The negative emotions in the ingroups of love towards emancipatory science and the love for socially sustainable science manifest, such that these groups are in an underprivileged position in academia and they consider their scope of action to be limited. By contrast, with their positively charged emotions of enthusiasm and pride, the ingroups of love for strategic science and love for holy science, imply that they have enough leeway in the academic sphere. In fact, with their triumphant emotions, these two forms of love work as effective twins that seduce academics into joining this group of high-flying, talented academics. As Cannizzo (2018) argue, the traditional figure of the devoted and talented academic becomes intermingled with the managerial ideals of excellence, productivity and efficiency. In this way, the traditional ideals of lofty science and the neoliberally tuned ideals of strategic science reinforce each other and simultaneously boost individualism and the competitive ethos in academia.

The disappointment within academia leaves the proponents of the love for emancipatory science and for socially sustainable science feeling that the ‘labour of love’ in science is retreating (Clarke et al., 2012) and that the socio-material conditions of neoliberal universities do not allow enough space to pursue emancipatory endeavours, the ethics of care and collegiality. According to Clarke et al. (2012), these conditions do not simply threaten individual academic identities, but also the very identity of the professional
community. This state of affairs inevitably raises the critical question of plurality: How can science sustain its plurality when the current neoliberal frames seem to deplete some forms of love?

As Ahmed (2014a: 122–124) states, the intention is not to define what love is, but to show how love becomes a way of bonding with the ‘others’ and the emotion that energises the work of these ‘love groups’ in seeking to defend their love against them. In a similar way, this study is not meant to evaluate the quality of love, but the way it organises and constructs the social order. The different conflicting, intersecting and partly overlapping dimensions of ‘othering’ show that academia is fragmented into separate ingroups that demonstrate the presence of disciplinary hierarchies (STEM fields versus SSH fields), generational divisions (‘old-time’ scholars versus junior academics), institutional divisions (university as elite institution versus mass education system) and divisions defining academic competence and merits (multiskilled, dynamic academic versus critical intellectual). With its Ahmed-inspired analytical gaze, this study demonstrated ‘love’ as an affective-discursive construction that plays a crucial role in drawing distinctions between different ingroups and in governing the elements in the social scale in academia.

This study used professional HE magazines as a data source. Because the authors in each article tend to adopt a certain angle regarding the subject at hand, the magazines may provide a simplistic view in a sense that every affective milieu would be attached to a certain professional or disciplinary position. The data from magazines do not demonstrate to what extent individuals migrate between different affective milieus; thus, the individual nuances remain hidden. However, they provide a glimpse into the official, public and private responses to the reconstruction of the university sector (Wetherell et al., 2015) and, thus, a profound overview of current academia.

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