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Title: Emotionally loaded identity and agency in Finnish academic work

Year: 2020

Version: Published version

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Please cite the original version:

Ursin, J., Vähäsantanen, K., McAlpine, L., & Hökkä, P. (2020). Emotionally loaded identity and agency in Finnish academic work. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 44(3), 311-325.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2018.1541971>

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To cite this article: Jani Ursin, Katja Vähäsantanen, Lynn McAlpine & Päivi Hökkä (2020) Emotionally loaded identity and agency in Finnish academic work, Journal of Further and Higher Education, 44:3, 311-325, DOI: [10.1080/0309877X.2018.1541971](https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2018.1541971)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2018.1541971>



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Emotionally loaded identity and agency in Finnish academic work

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ABSTRACT

This narrative study investigated identity, agency and emotions, amongst an under-researched academic group – those without PhDs with primary responsibility for teaching, who are also expected to do research. In this interview-based paper, we examine the experience of such Finnish academics in a research-intensive university. Thematic and then narrative approaches were employed. The findings demonstrated five narratives which indicated both balanced and tensioned relations as regards academic identity, with variable perceptions of agency and emotions embedded. The study contributes in two ways: first, it adds to the little that is known of the experiences of the aforementioned under-researched academic group. Second and more broadly, it provides insight into the emotionally loaded nature of academic work, and highlights the need for future research to explore academic identity and agency as emotionally imbued phenomena.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 14 December 2017
Accepted 24 October 2018

KEYWORDS

Academic work; identity; agency; emotion; higher education; narrative research

Introduction

Globally, the university as a workplace – and thus the life of academics in posts related to teaching and/or research – has been challenged and even transformed by new managerial practices (Marquina and Jones 2015). In Finland, the higher education system has witnessed several such transformations: for instance, nationally, a more performance-based salary structure (Jauhiainen, Jauhiainen, and Laiho 2009), and the New Universities Act of 2010 devolving civil-service employment relationships into contractual ones (Välilä 2012).

Not surprisingly, there are consequences to these cumulative changes with Finnish academics becoming polarised in different ways: those who benefit from the changes and those who do not; further, those who are able to influence the changes and those who are not (Ylijoki and Ursin 2013). In other words, global changes in the policies and governance of higher education affect the minutiae of daily activities.

In this paper, we focus on a particular role change of individuals having to take on research responsibilities, including perhaps completing a PhD, after being hired to teach. There are, in fact, few studies of such a shift (e.g. Ek et al. 2013; Logan et al. 2014) and those that exist rarely use the lens of identity. Furthermore, the emotional dimension of academic work has received little attention (Chemi and Jensen 2015; Postareff and Lindblom-Ylänne 2011). Hence, in response to the evident need, we investigated the experience of academics from the perspective of identity, particularly as regards agency and emotions.

This narrative study utilised semi-structured interviews with eight academics holding a teaching position in a Finnish research-intensive university. Traditionally in Finland, such academics have

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been employed without much (if any) pressure to do research. However, they are now expected to engage in research activities more actively, and if they lack a PhD, are expected to strive for one. Institutional pressures to conduct (and publish) research while teaching and undertaking administrative responsibilities create tensions between what academics perceive as their identity and the identity prescribed by their organisation (Jawitz 2009). We next introduce our theoretical framework, including definitions for identity, agency and emotion, plus the interactions between these.

Theoretical framework

Academic identity and emotions

We see academic identity as a work-history-based constellation of the perceptions of those doing teaching and/or research in higher education – whether their role is that of lecturer or PhD researcher. Identity thus encompasses an individual's views of work interests, values, ambitions, commitments and identifications, plus perceptions of essential work responsibilities and commitments (Vähäsantanen 2015; van Winkel et al. 2017).

One's academic identity is individually constructed, but always negotiated and actualised in everyday work practices and institutional surroundings, in relation to one's individual backgrounds and other people (especially colleagues and superiors). Consequently, academic identity is not a fixed entity, but something continuously reshaped and redefined through interaction, time and changing contexts (Ylijoki and Ursin 2013). Thus, our perspective on identity, given our emphasis on the social domain, takes note of the prevailing cultural narratives of identity drawn on by individuals (Churchman and King 2009; Ylijoki 2001).

Particularly, we acknowledge the importance of communities in shaping and reinforcing academic identities as well as individuals' distinctive roles in this process (Henkel 2005). According to Henkel (2005), academic identity is a function of community membership that is grounded in interactions between the individual and two key communities: firstly, the discipline and, secondly, higher education as an institution. Archer (2008), for her part, examined the formation of contemporary academic identities with regard to notions of authenticity and success. She placed an emphasis on identity formation as possibly composed of disrupted processes, involving feelings of both becoming and 'unbecoming' an academic.

Becoming and acting as a researcher is not merely a cognitive and competence-based process; it is also an emotional one, including tensions and conflicts (e.g. Yan and Lee 2016). According to Damasio (1994), emotions are externally expressed, observable and dynamic responses to specific events, entities or artefacts. In workplace contexts emotions can be understood as individually perceived reactions to organisational events, work situations and social interactions (Sieben and Wettergren 2010). Emotions, which can encompass passion, are also intrinsic motivators: they can drive individuals' intentions, leading them to invest in work, particularly research, to achieve goals beyond the immediate (Nardi 2005; Neumann 2006).

Others have emphasised the emotional nature of the negotiation and actualisation of identity in higher education teaching roles. Postareff and Lindblom-Ylänne (2011) reported mostly positive emotions (e.g. enthusiasm and enjoyment) relative to teaching. They also noticed that some academics consider teaching to be a duty, mainly because it is not as valued as research within their institutions, and does not fall within their academic identity. In their studies on academic identities, Knights and Clarke (2014) found that the emotion of insecurity shapes the way academic work is experienced. In the same vein, Lee and Boud (2003) pointed out the crucial role of desire in identity development.

Academic agency and emotions

Recent discussion has viewed agency in the higher educational context as intertwined with one's identities and relationships at work. Agency can be understood as referring to individuals'

opportunities and actions in striving for their interests and goals (Toom, Pyhältö, and Rust 2015; Vähäsantanen and Eteläpelto 2015). We acknowledge that there are individual variations in the goals people have at work, just as there are differences in the strategies for reaching these goals. According to McAlpine, Amundsen, and Turner (2014), agency represents the capacity to set personal goals towards which one is directing action, and to negotiate towards their achievement, no matter what expected or unexpected events crop up – though not always successfully. In exercising agency, individuals may have some degree of control over how they approach the practices they encounter; thus, they may choose to resist these practices, to adapt them, or to comply with them. Lastly, individuals vary in the degree of agency they perceive and enact in specific contexts.

In this sense, agency is embedded in the everyday activities of academic work and, further, can be pivotal for the development of individual and shared work practices (Pyhältö, Pietarinen, and Soini 2015). Working environments can be modified, for instance, by agentic efforts to shape existing work conditions and adopt new strategies. At the same time, agency can also be manifested through resisting external norms and regulations when these are seen to contradict academically justifiable practices (e.g. Toom, Pyhältö, and Rust 2015). Altogether, agency can be expressed through influencing and making decisions relative to individual and shared work practices. It is further facilitated, supported and inhibited by both individual contributions (e.g. work identities, work experiences) and social affordances (e.g. management practices, colleagues) (Toom, Pyhältö, and Rust 2015; Vähäsantanen 2015).

Recent studies have also addressed how agency is manifested in relationships. Goller and Harteis (2014) claim that proactive networking, and the negotiation of external demands, are the most important manifestations of agency. For his part, Hopwood (2010) has pointed out four themes bound up with agency in social relationships: (1) agency to help individuals get support and meet authentic needs, (2) agency for cultivating and nurturing relationships, (3) agency in the form of using relationships to influence learning, emotion or behaviour, and (4) agency to limit the scope of relationships, and to resist what others are suggesting to oneself.

Agency can also include being an accountable scholar, one who actively contributes to joint action, and who proposes and evaluates initiatives, expressing opinions in relevant communities (e.g. Toom, Pyhältö, and Rust 2015). An important element of the doctoral journey is identification and participation within an academic community. This can be a challenging task (Teeuwssen, Ratković, and Tilley 2014); thus, a study of doctoral students' sense of relational agency showed that only a minority of the students perceived themselves as active relational agents within their scholarly communities (Pyhältö and Keskinen 2012). It was notable that, compared to students who perceived themselves as passive objects in their communities, students who perceived themselves as active relational agents had, overall, more interest in their studies, fewer negative emotions and a smaller likelihood of considering abandoning their studies.

Academic identity, agency and emotions

Overall, we understand *academic identity* as a constellation of academics' interests, ambitions, commitments and goals, and as negotiated and actualised in everyday academic practices and communities. Academic identity refers to an individually experienced and socially embedded entity in relation to one's discipline-related roles as a teacher, and a researcher, for instance. It further encompasses personal backgrounds (e.g. one's past, present and future career) as well as one's institutional background. In this sense, both individual factors and social circumstances can essentially determine the negotiations and representations of identity.

In this context, *agency* refers to one's role and activity within the work community, including efforts and chances to influence individual and shared work practices. Consequently, we see the enactment of academic agency as grounded both in social conditions and in individual backgrounds. In this paper, we also explore emotions as intertwined with the negotiation and

actualisation of academic identity which is closely related to agency. We understand *emotions* as individually perceived reactions to organisational events, work situations and social interactions and as something that infuses 'our perception of others, the world around us and our own selves' (Burkitt 2012, 258).

Research questions

On the basis of the conceptualisations outlined here, we investigated the identity, agency and emotions of academics who had a full-time teaching position while also having the status of a doctoral student. For this purpose, we set the following research questions:

- (1) What kinds of narratives of academic identity were constructed?
- (2) What kinds of expressions of agency and emotions were related to the narratives of academic identity?

Methods

Participants

Given the descriptive approach of the study, we employed purposive sampling, seeking to include academics who had insight into the topic of investigation. The participants were drawn from a group of individuals ($n = 20$) enrolled in a development programme in a research-intensive university in Finland. The programme (which included six workshops) aimed to support the participants' identity development, particularly through helping the participants clarify their work roles amidst current changes, strengthening their agency in work communities, and increasing their well-being (see Hökkä, Vähäsantanen, and Mahlakaarto 2017). A programme was carried out in one research-intensive institution and with the participants from one discipline because department leaders were committed to allowing the participants to use their working time for the programme.

For the purpose of this study, we used interviews (conducted at the beginning of the programme) with eight participants; they all were carrying out teaching duties while also holding the status of a doctoral student, in fact, doing their PhD research (for more about Finnish doctoral training, see Pyhältö and Keskinen 2012, 139).

The interviewees were from the same university but at different stages in their academic careers, ranging from early-career academics to people with longer-standing positions. Two of the participants were males and six were females. Their ages varied from 33 to 57 years, and their working experience ranged from 6 to 23.5 years in the current organisation. All of the interviewees had a master's degree, and they worked within the same academic discipline. In order to secure the anonymity of the participants, we are not able to present more precise demographic information about the interviewees and their names have been changed in the examples that follow.

Data collection

The interviews followed a semi-structured protocol to elicit information mostly on the following themes: (1) the academics' work history and career, (2) their current work, identity and agency, and (3) their work-related challenges. During the interviews, the interviewees were encouraged to describe their perceptions, experiences, thoughts and emotions freely about these themes, without any rigorous guidelines and strictly formulated questions (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Although the interviews allowed considerable space for the interviewees' expressions, the interviews need to be understood as socially constructed between the interviewer and the interviewee (Riessman 2008). Hence, the accounts produced should be seen as temporal constructions of the

interviewees' identities (related agency and emotions) created through a certain sense-giving framework, at a certain point in time. The interview did not ask specific questions about emotions as our desire was to see to what extent emotion emerged as a part of individuals' representation of their experiences. However, due to the emotionally rich nature of the interviews, we included them in our investigation concerning academics' identity and agency.

Data analysis

Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were analysed using first a thematic approach (Braun and Clarke 2006). The first two authors coded each interview thematically in line with the research questions. We then compared, reached agreement and refined the definitions of the themes, and identified the main and sub-themes. Then, the other two authors independently reviewed some of the interviews and the codes with the empirical extracts and if necessary suggested some revisions to the codes and categories.

In the course of the thematic analysis, we identified accounts of identity within and across the interviews. Overall, we observed three different descriptions of identity as an academic, namely teacher, researcher and combined researcher-teacher. Furthermore, we identified and categorised accounts of contributory aspects in terms of constraints and resources connected to each description. These aspects were further classified into two categories, i.e. the *individual* (those originating from personal streaks) and the *social* (those stemming, for example, from the work community).

The next analytical steps concerned agency and emotions; during this process the descriptions of strong, weak and moderate agency were identified. This analytical phase also included identifying emotional expressions related to the representations of identity. In this way, our aim was to make visible emotionally imbued academic identities. In this phase, we coded, listed and categorised emotional expressions connected to academic identity by drawing on previous conceptualisations of emotions (Anttila et al. 2016; Postareff and Lindblom-Ylänne 2011).

Overall, we were able to identify various emotional expressions, including both negative and positive ones. It should nevertheless be noted that because the data for this study consisted of interview transcripts, we could only capture the verbal expressions of identity, agency and emotions. This means that in analysing emotions we were not able to track the participants' transient and situational physiological reactions and immediate emotions (Saldaña 2013).

Next, in the second phase, we employed culturally based narrative analysis as opposed to an individually constructed narrative approach. Such analysis is based on the notion that there are culturally available narratives which individuals draw on (and modify) to make sense of their experiences, and that an individual may draw on more than one narrative in explaining his or her experiences (McAlpine and Amundsen 2015). The goal of this analysis was to derive coherent narratives based on the accounts of the interviewees (which were identified and categorised in the first phase of analysis) in order to see what kinds of identities were constructed in the interviews, and also, what kinds of emotions and agency were described related to them. Based on the differences in these accounts, five distinct narratives were discerned (see Table 1). Each of them provides a different answer to what kinds of identities exist in the present-day university, and how these academic identities are related to emotions and agency.

The profiles of these five narratives varied in terms of balance and tension reflected (cf. Gergen and Gergen 1986). The two narratives of balance were loaded with expressions of positive emotions and referred to individuals' possibilities to realise core commitments, take action and influence at work. In contrast, the two narratives of tension were characterised by statements with gloomy emotional expressions in which individuals appeared to be limited in what they could undertake and achieve. Somewhere in between these extremes there was also a narrative of ambivalence, which combined elements from both these views concerning teacher and researcher identities, attaching to them variable emotions and moderate agency.



Table 1. Narratives of academic identities.

	Balanced			Tensioned		Combined
	Confident teacher	Passionate researcher	Insecure teacher	Inadequate researcher	Ambivalent academic	
Identity	Firm and socially constructed together with colleagues and students.	Channelled by intrinsic motivation with position permitting full commitment to research.	Lack of competencies to be a knowledgeable teacher, the notion is fuelled by the restrictive working environment.	Lack of competencies to be a proper researcher with experiences of institutional barriers (lack of time and institutional support).	Balanced and at times tensed relationship between teacher and researcher identities.	
Agency	Strong agency promoted by colleagues, superiors and one's own interests.	Strong agency supported by one's own interests and colleagues.	Weak agency framed by unsupportive colleagues and lack of own resources.	Weak agency framed by lack of own resources.	Moderate agency framed by superiors and individual resources.	
Emotions	Confidence, meaningfulness, satisfaction, enjoyment, happiness.	Enthusiasm, enjoyment, satisfaction, meaningfulness, excitement.	Insecurity, disappointment, exhaustion, non-appreciation.	Inadequacy, exhaustion, insecurity, guilt, anxiety, unfairness, fear.	Satisfaction, appreciation, meaningfulness, enjoyment, confusion.	

It should be emphasised that the unit of our analysis was not an individual academic; rather it was a fairly coherent communicative act that appeared to be representative across a number of individuals (Riessman 2008). As noted earlier, an individual might draw on cultural narrative with personal modifications (Hänninen 2004) in the course of an interview (Ylijoki and Ursin 2013). Therefore, our analysis was not attentive to how gender, age, stage of career and years in the work organisation, for example, are embedded within the narratives. The interviewees were kept informed about the study at its different stages and they were offered the possibility to read this paper, in line with the principles of trustworthiness and ethically sustainable research (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009).

Findings: narratives of academic identity

As a result of the analysis we identified five different kinds of cultural narratives via which the interviewees accounted for their identities. In other words, while regarding themselves broadly as academics, within their accounts they tended to favour one or more of the following narratives as representative of their experienced identity at the time of the interviews. These narratives were labelled as *confident teacher*, *insecure teacher*, *passionate researcher*, *inadequate researcher* and *ambivalent academic* (Table 1). We next describe each of the narratives, with their respective forms of agency and expressions of emotions.

The narrative of confident teacher

The narrative of confident teacher embodied a self-confident and knowledgeable academic identity with zeal for teaching. The work community was seen as enabling for the enactment of this desirable teacher identity in which supportive and trustworthy colleagues, and a position permitting a full commitment to teaching played a crucial role. In particular, the immediate work community was described as influencing the actualisation of one's teacher identity in a positive fashion, making it possible to design teaching and introduce new pedagogical practices together with one's colleagues, without anxiety. Committed students, as well, were considered to be important and emancipatory in this positioning of teacher identity:

Students are so amazing and it is possible to exercise creativity [with them] and invent all kinds of new things, and to experiment, and all of this is so motivational. (Anna)

Owing to an encouraging work community and positive perceptions of opportunities to realise the most important interests and goals as a teacher, such emotions as happiness, meaningfulness, satisfaction and enjoyment were connected to this narrative of confident teacher. This is demonstrated in the following quotation:

my work is pretty much dream work. So I've felt like this for a long time... I really have found that I can very largely carry out such things that are meaningful and interesting to myself in this teacher's job. And of course very smart, like truly great persons these students of ours. Working with them overall and on a daily basis is highly rewarding. And one thing probably affecting very much for this job is this immediate work community of ours that we've experienced anyway that we have a good spirit. Working this way collectively, as we do things very much together, and things are planned together and telling about matters and which are related for instance to work issues or other issues, so a kind of highly, you could say confidential atmosphere... I've often pondered what could be like such job descriptions which would be more meaningful, so I haven't actually found any. (Eetu)

The narrative of confident teacher represented strong agency allowing considerable freedom and possibility in deciding on what one was doing, the kinds of courses one could choose, and how one taught. All this made it possible to deal with one's professional commitments and to fulfil one's professional ambitions. In this narrative, agency was facilitated by supportive leadership, in

particular. This made it possible to work in the way one wanted, and it contributed positively to the meaningfulness of the work:

My superiors have always asked me, [is it] all right, so that in that sense I have had my own say about which task would be most preferable... For example, now we talked a bit about next autumn, and we had, or in fact I was asked for courses, and I said preferably that pro-seminar, so my superior listened to it right away, listened with a keen ear, so now I can say that my work plan includes certain components that I can influence myself. (Katri)

Furthermore, an inclusive, trustworthy and receptive work community was seen as important in enabling one's own ideas and influence on the teaching practices. Indeed, the narrative highlighted the importance of supportive colleagues in promoting the ability to act; however, one's own interests and motivation were also seen as crucial in contributing to agentic behaviour – and were often described in a positive light. For example, with the help of colleagues, one could gear the work towards something more agreeable and more closely related to one's preferred interests.

The narrative of insecure teacher

This narrative demonstrated an insecure teacher who saw teaching as important and would readily like to be committed to it, but lacked, however, the means and competences to be an adept teacher (i.e. to be sufficiently student-oriented and inspiring). The lack of personal resources of this kind was related to emotions of insecurity, as the following quotation demonstrates:

Perhaps I sometimes feel that I don't know how [to teach] ... this is related to the point that if you're doing something for the first time, then you're, like, uncertain, though on the other hand you know that it isn't all that catastrophic to be uncertain. (Katri)

This narrative considered the work community unsupportive; there was a lack of time and of institutional support for teaching (indicating that teaching was not duly appreciated by the university and that there were strong pressures to increase teaching loads with insufficient resources). Even the physical environment was assumed to restrict the actualisation of teacher identity (with personnel scattered in several buildings around the campus). Consequently, the narrative of insecure teacher prompted feelings of non-appreciation and exhaustion due to insufficient time for preparing the instruction and for carrying out other teaching duties, as described in the following quotation:

... but then again in the university community I do find that the lecturer's work is not in a sense appreciated in any way, well that might be putting it a bit strongly, but I do think that teaching tends to get so much trampled underfoot here. (Elsa)

In the narrative of insecure teacher, agency was rather weak. There was a possibility to shape some aspects of the teaching practices; however, efforts to be agentic did not always work out as planned. One interviewee described emotions of disappointment in terms of a failed teaching experiment:

... and then I even come up with something new, and I'm totally excited and I try it out, and then I put it into practice, and then I just get this feeling of emptiness, that this didn't work after all, and I wonder whether any student got anything out of it, and [there was] this one guy too, he seemed so bored, and he showed it quite bluntly. (Elsa)

In this narrative there was little possibility to influence the amount and contents of teaching. In particular, the work community with strong hierarchical relationships was seen as a source for reduced agency, offering little or no possibilities to influence what one could do at work. Thus, some colleagues might have priority in selecting what courses to teach, leaving less desirable courses to others. The distrust and tense working relationships between colleagues also prompted a lack of agency, in terms of possibilities to jointly modify or create new teaching practices and influence shared matters in the department. The narrative of insecure teacher illustrated an identity

with no individual resources and means to be more active in the work community; thus, the lack of 'agentic know-how' formed an everyday obstacle in adopting a more dynamic role. Even if this kind of lack was recognised there were no means to cope with it.

The narrative of passionate researcher

This narrative illustrated the identity of a knowledgeable and successful researcher. Intrinsic motivations (such as a passion for research) and competence (in terms of being a skilful researcher) for doing research formed the core of the narrative of passionate researcher. The role of the work community was seen as facilitative; there was collegial support available in conducting research, a position granting full engagement in research thus providing enough time to concentrate on research, and also institutional support for the research activities (i.e. encouraging management). The supportive peers were portrayed as follows:

We still do have this, sort of spontaneous research group for postgraduate students. So it's like, that one can then pose in a way rather stupid questions, with a low threshold, and then the thing is that with a colleague, for example, we started working here at the same time, and we've done similar work and started these studies, so in a way I can always first consider with her what on earth this [laughs] [interviewer: thing might be]. (Jaana)

In this narrative the opportunities for concentrating on research, instead of teaching, raised mainly positive emotions of excitement, enthusiasm, enjoyment, satisfaction and meaningfulness, which were depicted, for example, in the following way:

Now I do find it terribly wonderful that I've got a chance and time to do research, and I'm really excited... it is now proper research [my main interest], as I would want it to be, and I actually find some teaching periods disturbing. Now I just feel these kinds of things, that what I want now, like really want, is to do that research, and to take it further, and to learn with it. (Tiina)

The narrative of passionate researcher portrayed strong agency. Although in this narrative there was time to do research the narrative also included one's own activity in terms of being energetic and persistent in negotiating for more time for research, and in actively proposing new work practices (in line with one's own researcher identity), for instance, in meetings:

No, we don't have doctoral seminars and groups here. Well I tried to suggest yesterday that this kind of official group could be established. We had a long meeting and I thought to suggest it. People have tried to take it up and it has been brought up but nothing has been done for this matter. It is indeed like a really big flaw, and now we have many postgraduates, so I felt like that it can't work this way... I could imagine that this group would anyway somehow bring assertiveness and support and help proceed with the thesis, even strongly I guess. (Tiina)

In the narrative of passionate researcher a work community composed of supportive colleagues was seen to encourage active participation in shared work practices and researcher communities.

The narrative of inadequate researcher

This narrative mostly described academics' engagement in research, but also portrayed a researcher identity characterised by distress and feelings of inadequacy due to lacking competence to do research (for example, in terms of research methods and academic writing). Shortcomings in this respect also caused anxiety, fear and insecurity as this narrative portrayed uncertainties of how to manage and finish doctoral studies. The narrative also included internal pressures to be more active in research, and inability to respond to these pressures raised feelings of guilt. The work community was presented as something that prevented one from being an adequate researcher; for instance, due to one's restrictive organisational position and a lack of time and institutional support for doing research. The limited time resources for doing research were illustrated in the following quotation:

You always get this feeling that you are too busy to read enough, and well, there is not enough time anyway to, like, familiarise yourself with everything [the way] you would wish, you know, this kind of thing, so perhaps that's it, but it's just a reality of life. (Tiina)

These kinds of restrictions for being a successful researcher prompted negative emotions, including exhaustion and anxiety. Unfairness was also expressed, especially when there were no possibilities to focus on the research even if desired.

This narrative also included descriptions of the increased institutional demands to produce research results. Related to these pressures, the restrictive nature of one's work setting as combined with feelings of inadequacy was described as follows:

But nowadays perhaps this kind of a certain feeling of inadequacy, like, in conjunction with these current trends in research. So that I do feel in things like that that I'm not able to respond to the challenge the way that would certainly be desirable. And then [there's] this point, which I know largely affects the financial affairs of the department, and the whole university as well, so I somehow feel that maybe I'm not the strongest piece myself in that structure. (Eetu)

Agency in the narrative of inadequate researcher is weak. One's vulnerability as a researcher was recognised, for example, when trying to successfully respond to the requirements posed by the university. Nonetheless, there were no stated agentic means to tackle these demands. In this sense, the identity featured no assets for being more active in research. There were also only small possibilities and few attempts to negotiate more room for research, which was due to the strict job descriptions, previous failed attempts to do so or lack of courage:

This work task of mine is contradictory without sufficient time for research... so how should I now go about this, so should I set out and act on this situation somehow; should I set out to advocate my own rights or shall I just stay here and comply. And I'm grateful that I've got a job, because earlier I was in fear of becoming unemployed... Well, I'm just satisfied that I have work, but yet there are such things for which one gets the feeling of injustice, specifically. (Anna)

The narrative of ambivalent academic

There was also a narrative that displayed a more or less balanced or (at times) tensed relationship between teacher and researcher identities within the everyday practice. This balancing relationship was seen as workable when teaching and research supported each other, and when there were enough personal resources to do both tasks properly. Enough time was found, for example, when it was possible to teach familiar courses with accustomed routines. The balance was also externally endorsed when enough time was reserved for both tasks. At its best, the narrative of combining teacher and researcher identities evoked emotions of satisfaction, appreciation, meaningfulness and enjoyment since it was possible to integrate research and teaching successfully:

Well, I have now had quite an excellent opportunity to do research or I'm satisfied with the amount, so as I'm hired as a university teacher. And in a way my job description doesn't formally include awfully lot of research. (Loviisa)

However, this narrative also highlighted the challenging nature of combining teaching and research in fruitful and practical ways. Thus, a constraining factor was often involved: there was not enough time to carry out both tasks properly. This tensed relationship between teaching and research in this narrative was reflected in the following way:

Well [integrating teacher and researcher identities] firstly requires that you should want to see the research as something that somehow benefits teaching. Or at least I absolutely find that they cannot be separate. Once you realise how they benefit each other, like the research bring something to teaching and the other way round, so then intertwining them is in a way extremely delightful. (Loviisa)

The narrative was also composed of emotions of confusion. The following quotation reflects the tensions and confusion brought about by combining teaching and research duties, regarding both time management and academic identity:

Now it's a kind of crazy combination of research and teaching, so that I do have a bit of like a schizo feeling about this – when am I a researcher, and when am I a teacher? So perhaps I'm now between these two identities as well, so am I a researcher or am I a teacher, or am I now both? So, I am like, having problems in terms of time and at this identity level. (Tiina)

In the narrative of ambivalent academic identity, agency was moderate, since it was not always possible to influence one's work. For example, the needs of students (such as responding to their emails) might override one's own research activities. This narrative portrayed the superiors as important; due to a position of being a university teacher the relationship between research and teaching needed to be negotiated and renegotiated with the superiors. Sometimes there was enough time for research and sometimes there was a need to concentrate fully on teaching:

So depending on the year I have been allowed to devote time for the dissertation... Now I have some deduction from the teaching hours and then in a way I can thereby do research. I try to devote one day a week [for research], or roughly speaking it has not been quite like that, but in previous years it was even worse. So this year it's the one day a week, as I have that much less of teaching... (Loviisa)

Conclusions

Our findings revealed five culturally available narratives of academic identity, namely the narratives of confident teacher, insecure teacher, passionate researcher, inadequate researcher and ambivalent academic. Not surprisingly, a supportive work community facilitated the actualisation of the narratives of confident teacher and passionate researcher. In contrast, within the narratives of insecure teacher and inadequate researcher, a lack of time and a narrowly defined work role emerged as the main external constraints for the enactment of researcher and teacher identities. Furthermore, some individual aspects such as competences, for example, competence to do research, strongly influenced the actualisation of academic identity. Thus, our study confirms the previous notions that identity is constructed in the interaction of the individual and the social (Vähäsantanen 2015).

In the present study, the level of academic agency seemed to vary, and it involved the ability to influence the contents and methods of work, shared practices and participation in the social relationships of the work community. The tensioned narratives designating weak agency (insecure teacher and inadequate researcher) included mainly expressions of adaptation, and there were few actual efforts to influence what were perceived as external matters. Likewise, in their study Pyhältö and Keskinen (2012) pointed out that only a minority of doctoral students saw themselves as active agents in their communities. However, our findings also revealed that the narratives of balance with strong agency (confident teacher and passionate researcher) tended to include agentic efforts and rewarding, positively reinforcing experiences. Within these narratives, the interviewees recounted considerable opportunities to influence their work activities and, to a certain extent, to participate actively in the academic community. This also encompassed spaces for designing and implementing pedagogical and research activities with their colleagues.

The findings provide further evidence that identity and agency are intertwined in the university context (Toom, Pyhältö, and Rust 2015; McAlpine, Amundsen, and Turner 2014; Vähäsantanen 2015). The narratives of balance with strong agency indicate, for example, that supportive superiors and joint active efforts with colleagues to change the content of the work helped the academics align the work duties with their respective teacher and researcher identities. In this sense, agency can be seen as partly represented in the use of academic relationships to influence and change one's work practices in accordance with the desired identity. This finding is in line with Hopwood's (2010) conceptualisation of agency as the use of relationships to impact practices, in order to meet

particular goals and needs. Thus, although the opportunities to actualise different identities were closely related to the academics' position and hence time allocated for research, in particular, in some cases it was possible to renegotiate and change one's work practices and job descriptions by agentic efforts and activities. However, the weak agency apparent in the tensioned narratives of insecure teacher and inadequate researcher demonstrated reluctance or hesitation to attempt to modify the content of one's work within the prevailing hierarchical relationships, even if there was a desire to have more research included in one's work tasks. Overall, the findings illustrate the role of agency for actualising and negotiating academic identities (see also Buchanan 2015).

All the narratives of academic identities were emotionally loaded. Similarly to the study by Postareff and Lindblom-Ylänne (2011), emotional expressions related to teacher identity included both negative (e.g. disappointment, non-appreciation) and positive expressions (e.g. enjoyment, meaningfulness). Further, our study also pointed out that this twofold nature of emotions was essentially affecting the way researcher identity was narrated. Overall, the positive emotions emerged notably when the academics were able to express their main interests, ambitions and skills, while negative ones arose from the lack of these kinds of opportunities.

The challenging aspects of academic work that were highlighted in the narratives arose from a need to negotiate between internal work ambitions and competences, and external expectations for active engagement in research, involving pressures to combine high-quality teaching and research. Such circumstances were often described in terms of a conflict. The narratives, in general, included feelings of pressure to be eager and active in research. However, the time to do research may be limited, and the level of competence that should be attained may be difficult to achieve (cf. Knights and Clarke 2014). The external conditions and pressures for academic identity and work were perceived as somewhat uncompromising, and they led to expressions of negative emotions (e.g. inadequacy).

In this study, there was variation in the emotions expressed in the narratives, even if the participants' work tasks and work environments were fairly similar, and they faced similar external changes in their work. Based on the findings, we suggest that academic work, academic identity, and agency within academia should each be understood as emotionally imbued. In this sense, we agree with some recent studies which have indicated the close connection between agency and emotions (Pyhältö and Keskinen 2012; McAlpine 2016; Vähäsantanen and Eteläpelto 2015) and which have described the ways in which identity is emotionally loaded (e.g. Lee and Boud 2003; Postareff and Lindblom-Ylänne 2011). Hence, emotions need to be seen also as intimately bound up with the academic world we live and work in.

Our study has its limitations, of course. First of all, the participants were individuals who had signed up for a programme designed to help them reflect on their academic identity. In this respect, we acknowledge that the emotionally imbued narratives of identity emerging from the data here may not necessarily represent academics elsewhere. While academic identities are necessarily shaped within local university contexts, any such locally anchored identities will nevertheless serve as relevant points of view bringing different academics' voices into discussions concerning the nature of current academic work. However, future research could elaborate how organisational climate and culture are connected to academics' identities via interviewing academics coming from different academic contexts. To see if different narratives are attributed to other factors, such as stage of career and age, would be a good topic for future studies.

Finally, the academic identities presented in this paper are not to be seen as absolute representations of what individual academics are like; rather, these identities are products of socially situated actions that these academics perform when telling and constructing their stories of academic work. At the very least, the study would seem to indicate a need for better acknowledgement of the role of emotions in academia, as argued also by Neumann (2006) and by Nardi (2005).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the Academy of Finland [288925].

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