

Academic Resistance - How to Start a Rebellion with a Book?

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Abstract

University has transformed from a cradle of civilisation towards the ideals of the corporate world. Competitiveness, performance orientation, and the demand for applicability of research results for the business world are familiar to many working in universities. In addition, the university itself has historically been built on patriarchal, colonialist, and elitist foundations. Today, the neoliberal ethos of funding and publishing requirements is fuelling these inequalities. We present a book project that has emerged as a reaction to these problems. We asked Finnish academics to contribute fiction texts which describe their own experiences of the problems of academia and their ways of rebellion against them. We received a staggering 70 submissions, which covered a wide range of experiences of university teachers, researchers, administrators and students. Summarising these texts we will outline our *Academic Rebellion* -book project as a form of gentle but radical and open resistance in the academic world.

Full paper

The transformation of the university from a cradle of civilisation to the ideals of the corporate world has been noted in numerous studies (Ball, 2008, 2016; Huang et al., 2016; Morrisey, 2013). The university landscape is profoundly shaped by a number of factors, including competitiveness, performance orientation, feelings of inadequacy and the demand for scientific applicability (Rhoads & Slaughter, 2006). Conversely, the university itself has been historically constructed upon patriarchal, colonialist and elitist foundations (Arday & Mirza, 2018). In the contemporary era, the neoliberal ethos of funding and publishing requirements is fuelling these inequalities. This affects all actors in academia, but manifests itself in different ways at different career stages and positions.

We present a book project that has emerged as a reaction to these problems. The *Academic Rebellion* -book is an edited work that examines and experientially explores the grievances of the academic world and ways to rebel against them. The idea for the book was inspired by the changes in

the academic world and the heightened criticism of the university and scientific institutions in general in the public debate in Finland. For instance, the discourse surrounding the public criticism of research funding decisions, and the outright denial of research results in public debate and their subsequent dismissal in politics, collectively convey a significant insight into the value of science. The public image of scientists may be that of ivory tower watchers who have become detached from reality. However, in practice, the academic staff (including different ways of funding) work in a very precarious position, strongly influenced by competition, hierarchies and even unspoken norms and social codes (Olssen, 2016).

The book gives voice to the academic community and their experiences of operating inside the neoliberal academia. The book employs a diverse range of writing conventions, rather than traditional academic articles, in keeping with the experiential starting point of the book. We requested academics to provide fictional texts describing their personal encounters with the challenges of academia and how they defy them. We invited writers to challenge the academic conventions and inspire readers to challenge the status quo. We received a staggering 70 submissions, which covered a wide range of experiences of university teachers, researchers, administrators and students. The authors were free to express their experiences and feelings. The texts took the form of reflective essays, stories, or poems, for example. In practice, the *Academic Rebellion* articulates the emotions and perspectives that academics experience in their own lives otherwise difficult to verbalise.

The book provides a platform for members of the academic community to describe the challenges the academic world is currently facing from their own perspective, in a critical manner, and to propose strategies for challenging problematic hegemonic structures. Examples of academic resistance include various forms of activism, peer and mentoring activities, researcher associations, alternative models of education and research, science communication and the internet, and finally, the decision to leave the university. The emotions explored in the book include anger, envy, disappointment and greed, but also joy, security and excitement. The book is primarily designed to inspire and motivate, rather than discourage, the reader. *Academic Rebellion* challenges the conventional methods of scientific knowledge production and combines them with artistic means of expression. The book itself is therefore an expression of rebellion.

The book offers an invitation to a gentle yet radical form of open rebellion and it is directed for anyone interested in the university as a critical social institution. For academics themselves, the book can provide a source of peer support and examples of forms of rebellion. For a broader audience, including policy-makers, politicians and other sectors of education, *Academic Rebellion* elucidates the challenges pertaining to the university sector in a comprehensible manner. The objective of this book is to stimulate the academic community to recognise the structural issues inherent to the university institution, which they collectively perpetuate in order to maintain and reinforce the current system. Furthermore, we are encouraging

academics to form alliances and utilise their collective influence to challenge and transform the prevailing practices that perpetuate malaise.

While we do not present academic research per se, we will present and analyse the texts we received and our experiences as the editors of this book in order to portray an example of what academic resistance can be in practice. At the core of this rebellion is the radical view that it is impossible to determine the value of research in advance. Research has intrinsic value. The book thus serves as a justification and defence of academic freedom.

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