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Micro-activism and wellbeing: 1,000s of snowflakes and the potential avalanche

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Chapter Abstract

Activism, or acts of protest and challenge against wider power structures and injustices, has been emerging (or resurging) as a common and high-profile phenomenon in and around organisations over the last two decades. Over this time, evidence has highlighted that activism can have a positive but variable relationship with wellbeing, in hedonic, eudaimonic, social, and health terms. However, this evidence tends to focus on forms of activism where there is a public visibility and collective assemblage to the activism, rather than forms which may be hidden and individualistic. This 'micro-activism', though contested in terms of its efficacy, is particularly prevalent in contexts where there are salient and insidious power structures infiltrating all aspects of work (and life), and where open resistance can be highly damaging or life threatening. A contemporary example of this is the hyper-competitive context of academic life in Western universities, where the demands of extreme managerialism are, at their worst, systemically destroying lives. Drawing on auto/ethnographic accounts from academic life in different cultural contexts, we consider how micro-activism can potentially address positive drivers of wellbeing in organisations, particularly through addressing the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. We conclude by outlining future directions of research.

Chapter Keywords

micro-activism, resistance, well-being

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Introduction

Activism, or acts of protest and challenge against wider power structures and injustices, has been emerging (or resurging) as a common and high-profile phenomenon in and around organisations over the last two decades (Mumby, Thomas, Martí, and Seidl, 2017). This activism has seemingly emerged as a response to acts and events which stand counter the positive progress in agendas such as equality and sustainability in organisations; workers are standing up for the climate emergency, objecting to the intentional cover-up of car emissions and pollution, angered by the way black people are treated in and out of work, and they are outraged by systemic sexual harassment of women in Hollywood and beyond. Over this time, evidence has also highlighted that activism can have a positive but variable relationship with wellbeing, in terms of hedonic, eudaimonic, social, and health perspectives. This is not surprising given Aristotle's view that human beings are, by nature, political, and therefore engaging in political activity is linked to our sense of wellbeing in organisational life (Klar and Kasser, 2009). Activism therefore has the potential to satisfy our basic psychological needs as humans; through feeling a sense of *autonomy* to do something (rather than nothing), with a sense of *relatedness* to those with a similar passion, and refine or develop new *competences* whilst doing so (Vestergren, Drury, and Chiriac, 2017).

However, this evidence tends to focus on forms of activism where there is a public visibility and collective assemblage to the activism, rather than forms which may be relatively hidden and individualistic. There are other forms of activism which intentionally avoid a public visibility or collective character, as doing so might be damaging to the activist in terms of their career or even their life. This 'micro-activism', though contested in terms of its efficacy, is particularly prevalent in contexts where there are salient and insidious power structures infiltrating all aspects of work (and life), and where open resistance can be dramatic and significant. Here, micro-activism therefore becomes a 'weapon of the weak' (Scott, 1990). A contemporary example of this is the hyper-competitive context of academic life in Western universities, where the demands of extreme managerialism are, at their worst, destroying lives.

By drawing on ethnographic accounts from academic life in different cultural contexts, this chapter considers how micro-activism can potentially address positive drivers of wellbeing in organisations. This chapter is structured as follows. First, the chapter considers the relationships between wellbeing and activism; the extant literature highlights a range of positive relationships, but it is primarily focused on social or public forms of activism, rather than the less conspicuous or hidden forms which may be the only form of activism available to workers in some organisations. Second, this more covert form of activism is considered in more detail, particularly in relation to academic life, and we exemplify how micro-activism can specifically target positive drivers of wellbeing at work in this setting. We then consider three micro-activism case studies in more detail to elucidate the contextualities of the acts. Finally, we draw the analysis of the acts together to highlight important ways in which micro-activism appears to link to wellbeing in organisations, and we conclude by outlining future directions of research. Although the dynamics between micro-activism and wellbeing is an emerging area of study, we highlight the presence of multi-directional relationships underpinned by dialogical dimensions, and pinpoint lines of enquiry for future research.

Wellbeing associated with activism and activists

Studies that have explored the relationships between activism and wellbeing in and around organisational life have typically focused on public forms of activism which challenge a form of injustice in society. These studies have, for example, examined the wellbeing of activists who contribute to civil rights or women's liberation movements (Lee, 2004), campus activism (Klar and Kasser, 2009), climate change or environmental action (Vestergren, Drury, and Chiriac, 2017), social justice and democracy in academe (Rhodes, Wright, and Pullen, 2018), workers' and healthcare rights (Jasko, Szastok, Grzymala-Moszczynska, Maj & Kruglanski, 2019), and civic engagement for democratic rights in communist states (Chan and Mak, 2020). They have involved those identifying as activists as well as those who do not, but who have expressed behavioural indicators or proxies which indicate a level of activism, such including taking a leadership role, taking on organisational responsibilities, marching or demonstrating, providing financial support, or providing some other form of moral support in relation to political work (e.g. Lee, 2004, Klar and Kasser, 2009).

Activism has been associated with a wide range of biographical changes, from momentary sensations of positive affect through to longer lasting, career and family impacts, or even changes in personality (Boehnke & Wong, 2011), and have been categorised as 'objective' changes (such as marital status and children) or 'subjective' (such as self-reported sense of wellbeing, identity or empowerment) (Vestergren, Drury, and Chiriac, 2017). Within these studies, wellbeing has been conceptualised through hedonic, eudaimonic, social, and health perspectives. The first of these, *hedonic wellbeing*, is the most typical in studies, and examines constructs of life satisfaction, personal satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect. Such constructs were operationalised through adaptations of the satisfaction with life scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin, 1985), a 'state' version of the positive affect/negative affect scale (Watson, Clark, and Tellegen, 1988), and the State Hope Scale (Snyder, Sympson, Ybasco, Borders, Babyak, and Higgins, 1996).

In *eudaimonic wellbeing*, focus moves to the extent to which a human is 'fully functioning', which is conceptualised as a sense of meaning and self-realisation (Ryan and Deci, 2001) and vitality, reflecting the energy of the functioning self (Ryan and Deci, 2008). Specifically, scales from a variety of instruments have been used such as: the Short Index of Self-Actualization (Jones and Crandall, 1986), the psychological well-being scale which considers autonomy, environmental mastery, and positive relations with others (Ryff, 1989), the Basic Psychological Needs Scale which includes the aspects of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci and Ryan, 2007), the meaning in life questionnaire (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, and Kaler., 2006), and the 'state' level version of the vitality scale (Ryan and Frederick, 1997).

Social wellbeing, a third perspective examined in the activism and wellbeing literature, focuses on one's own sense of own circumstances and functioning in a society (Keyes, 1998, 2002). This differentiates five distinctive areas: social integration (a sense of having something in common and belonging with others), social acceptance (a sense of feeling at ease with others), social contribution (a sense of value of oneself to a wider society), social actualisation (a sense of hope or potential that society will develop and grow), and social coherence (a sense of knowing and meaning in life) (ibid). Such perspectives join *general health*, *physical health*, and *psychological health* sub-scales to examine wellbeing, the latter of which was informed by the Symptom Checklist (Gurin, Veroff, and Feld, 1960) (e.g. Vestergren, Drury, and Chiriac, 2018; Vestergren, Drury and Hammar Chiriac, 2019). And finally, Klar and Kasser (2009) combined a range of these scales to examine *flourishing* (Keyes, 1998, 2002), a state which is operationalised as being a 'high' (upper tertile or

quintile) level of life satisfaction or positive affect and in most of the sub-scales used to operationalise wellbeing (e.g. 6 of the 11, see Klar and Kasser, 2009).

Empirical work has typically found positive relationships between behavioural indicators of activism and these different scales for wellbeing, for example, across combined hedonic, eudaimonic, social wellbeing scales (Klar and Kasser, 2009), with more specific scales such as psychological and social wellbeing (Chan and Mak, 2020), with personal significance and meaning (Jasko, Szastok, Grzymala-Moszczynska, Maj and Kruglanski, 2019) and with happiness later in life (Boehnke & Wong, 2011). Such findings are consistent with other studies which indicate that activism typically generate a sense of empowerment, self-esteem, and self-confidence (Vestergren, Drury, and Chiriac, 2017). However, evidence also highlights more nuanced dynamics when describing the relationships between activism and wellbeing. For example, Klar and Kasser (2009) found that those who express activism *above the mean* expression of activism were three times more likely to be *flourishing* than those who were *below the mean* expression. As such, this suggests that some expressions of activism may fulfil a wider range of human needs than others, for example, feeling a stronger sense of belonging and meaning when engaging in more activity linked to the activism.

Given that causation is still an ongoing criticism of the activism and wellbeing research (Vestergren, Drury, and Chiriac, 2017), the relationship between activism and flourishing may also be explained by a variety of unidirectional dynamics between the various scales of wellbeing. For example, a stronger sense of meaning might simultaneously impact positive affect, sense of social integration, and social acceptance, but a sense of positive affect may not necessarily affect sense of meaning, sense of social integration, or social acceptance. Becker, Tausch and Wagner's (2011) study further problematises this discussion as it found that engaging in activism can simultaneously generate 'positive' affect (e.g. a self-directed solidarity and unity) *as well as* 'negative' affect (such as anger and contempt directed at those as part of the 'outer group'). Indeed, in some cases, the activism was not so easily understood in these ways, and were more accurately experienced as *coping* (Páez et al. 2007).

This means how activism plays out into wellbeing is not so clear cut and certain, and echoes Lee's (2004) study which found no significant relationship between wellbeing and activism. In her study, Lee suggested that the Black women activists in her sample were markedly different to prior studies, that is, they had all previously attended a "historically Black" university, and as such might have had different expectations of their education, life, and their activism (though it was unclear what these were). Nonetheless, other studies have highlighted the importance of expectations and the perceived achievement of them, as well as the identification of activist with the in-group and out-groups to which the activism is targeted, with wellbeing (Becker and Tausch, 2015; Vestergren, Drury, and Chiriac, 2017). For example, evidence suggests there can be negative impacts on wellbeing when activists do not see that their efforts materialise (ibid), and participation in activism can strain relationships or cause burnout when there are excessive emotional demands (Downton and Wehr, 1998; Einwohner, 2002). The latter can be particularly prevalent when the activist identifies with those within disadvantaged group (e.g. workers) *and* with those at which the activism is targeted (e.g. managers), which ultimately dampens activist action and change work (Becker and Tausch, 2015).

The final aspect which brings nuance to the dynamic between activism and wellbeing relates to the scale or risk of the activist act. In their study, Klar and Kasser (2009) found that those "who did the *brief* activist behavior reported significantly higher levels of subjective vitality than did the subjects who engaged in the nonactivist behaviour" (p 755, emphasis added). As vitality is as an indicator of human needs being met, these findings suggest that smaller scale

activist activity therefore "fosters the expression of intrinsic motivation" (Klar and Kasser, p. 772) and the wellbeing benefits associated with it. However, it is important to recognise that this study, along with the extant literature discussed in this section, predominantly conceptualised activism as a *social* activism, where activists are engaging with others for a known, wider social purpose. Here, it is possible to conceive of how activity related to social activism maps to basic psychological needs such as autonomy (choosing to protest against an injustice), competence (to deliver a protest, to make the news, maybe to deliver a change), and relatedness (with others who you identify with) (Deci and Ryan, 2007). Yet this social or public form of activism is only one form of activism, and is not always possible. This is where micro-activism can have a role, and has become an emerging phenomenon for wellbeing in and around organisations.

Micro-activism and wellbeing: a 'weapon of the weak'

Activism in and around organisations has been conceptualised along two continua which approximate (rather than clearly delineate) extremes: from hidden to public, and individual to collective (Mumby, Thomas, Martí, and Seidl, 2017). In relation to the previous discussion, such a conceptualisation recognises forms of activism which is not typically examined, that is, forms of resistance which are typically or for the most part hidden (rather than public or visible to others), and which are typically actioned by individuals (rather than by a collective). This form of activism, which we have referred to here as micro-activism, has been heavily criticised, both in terms of whether 'it counts' as activism and in terms of its efficacy (Mumby, Thomas, Martí, and Seidl, 2017). These criticisms, however, are insensitive to the circumstances of such activism; in some contexts, there are salient, asymmetrical and insidious power structures which render public forms of resistance as highly damaging or even life threatening (Parker, 2018).

Originally in the context of 'peasants', or those without power resources to resist against those with power, Scott (1990) referred to such micro-activism as relatively 'hidden' "weapons of the weak". Such notions highlight the behavioural tactics (micro-acts of activism) that people may use or experience as the only possible way to engage in resistance within and around organisational spaces. Yet the relevance of such analyses has been extended to other work contexts where such asymmetries infiltrate and severely constrain the work and life of those who engage in it. This highlights the wider trend towards the precariousness of work in organisations, where even those who are highly skilled and well paid are subject to vulnerabilities. For example, evidence shows that National Football League (NFL) players who have engaged in public protests are more likely to experience pay cuts and less likely to experience pay growth, compared to those who have not. As Niven (2020, p 641) argues:

> [I]f NFL players—who work in the public eye, hold proven track records of accomplishment, and compete in a market that prides itself on analytic efficiency—can be punished by their employers for political activism, it suggests the truly profound vulnerability of everyday workers who labor without those advantages.

A context which is increasingly problematized and documented as an emotionally and physically oppressive and damaging work environment is academe (Anderson, 2008; Sparkes, 2007, 2018; Bristow, Robinson, and Ratle, 2017; Cunliffe, 2018; Rhodes, Wright, and Pullen, 2018; Smith and Ulus, 2019). Here, managerialist drives have penetrated all aspects of academic work and have even crossed over into home life to propel ever increasing efficiency and outputs. For example, Sparkes (2007) described the ways in which academic work had become deeply entangled with an oppressive audit culture, in terms of teaching,

research, and administration, and were ultimately embodied in the increasingly damaged bodies of academics. Consistent with the terrors of the implied and explicit managerialist threats documented in his initial empirical work (Sparkes, 2007), these terrors materialised in Sparkes own work and life after the publication of this study, documented in a subsequent study published a decade later (Sparkes, 2018). As Smith and Ulus (2019, p. 1) describe it, it is a setting where it is a 'taboo' to speak

> openly about mental health and emotional well-being in academic institutions, with masculine structures and encroaching neoliberal discourses that create hostile atmospheres unsupportive of vulnerability and uncertainty.

And that:

> The threats to academics' well-being are many: work intensification; job insecurity; expectations to obtain highly competitive grants; Research Excellence Framework (REF) targets and Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) targets in the UK context (ibid, p. 5).

Within such contexts, to judge micro-activism within a managerialist regime of efficacy, efficiency and effectiveness underestimates the contextual constraints (Mumby et al, 2017) and undermines the potential for it to generate other outcomes such as wellbeing. For example, by finding a way to express a micro-act such as foot-dragging (Scott, 1990), a person might be expressing the only modicum of autonomy they feel they have in such a precarious work setting. To bring a more nuanced analysis of the contextual features of academe and how they impact wellbeing at work, we summarise how some of the contextual features undermine the positive drivers of wellbeing at work (Lomas, 2019) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Examples of how academic context undermine positive drivers of wellbeing at work (framework: Lomas, 2019)

Psychological drivers of wellbeing	Physical drivers of wellbeing	Socio-cultural drivers of wellbeing
Strengths: Externally imposed work tasks not necessarily linked to existing strengths, capabilities, skills or knowledge (e.g. Franco-Santos, Nalick, Rivera-Torres, Gomez-Mejia, 2017; Smith and Ulus, 2019).	*Health and safety*: Systemic lack of acknowledgment of mental health risks and harm (e.g. Aubrecht, 2012, Guthrie, Lichten, Van Belle, Ball, Knack, and Hofman, 2017) or actual emotional or physical damage in the workplace (e.g. Wall et al, 2017).	*Relationships*: Toxic relations related to hyper-competitive, masculine relationships in work teams and culturally prized peer-review systems for project and article selection processes (e.g. Sparkes, 2007; Horn, 2016), and neoliberally enforced pressure to become closer with others (Chory and Offstein, 2016).
Emotions: Expectations to self-manage own pain, discomfort, and mental health concerns – often framed and silenced by the 'self-care' agenda (Smith and Ulus, 2019). Fear of the implications of sharing emotions (Askins and Blazek, 2017).	*Workload and scheduling*: Excessive teaching and research workloads (e.g. Sparkes, 2007) and impossibility of prioritising high priority tasks (e.g. Barnett, 2000).	*Leadership*: Unethical, irresponsible or threatening leadership behaviours (e.g. Sparkes, 2018; Amis, Munir, Lawrence, Hirsch, and McGahan, 2018).
Purpose: Lack of opportunity to undertake meaningful work or focus on low-value, repetitive, administrative work (e.g. Sparkes, 2007; Chapman and McClendon, 2018). Sense of alienation (Alakavuklar, Dickson, and Stablein, 2017).	*Control and content*: Limited ability to decide the pattern of teaching and research delivery (e.g. Sparkes, 2007, Wall, 2016). Uncertainty as to how an academic's work will be judged (Ruth et al., 2018).	*Values*: Work which does not align with own personal values, for example, dysfunctional conceptions of impact (e.g. Rhodes, Wright, and Pullen, 2018), or lack of interest in gender or other forms of equality (e.g. Cunliffe, 2018; Wall, Giles, and Stanton, 2019) or sustainability (e.g. Wall, Clough, Österlind, and Hindley, 2019).
Personal and professional development: Focus on individual self-care and resilience training leading to cultures of shame and fear rather than wider system change (Smith and Ulus, 2019), expectations that experts should not ask for help (Elraz, 2017), aggressive change programmes (Parker, 2014).		*Reward-recognition*: Lack of appropriate recognition in the system, for example, the strict use of faulty and damaging ranking systems (e.g. Anderson, Elliott, and Callahan, 2020; Tourish, 2020.

We want to emphasise the contextual nature of resistance (Mumby et al, 2017) to extend Scott's (1990) metaphor which helps to justify and legitimate micro-activism beyond what some might describe "petty acts"; what might look like a single 'snowflake' to some, might feel like an avalanche of 1,000 snowflakes for others in terms of the development of their wellbeing. The rest of this chapter takes inspiration from this notion to foreground and document the ways in which micro-activism and wellbeing relate. The following discussion documents three cases of micro-activism and the ways in which they promote, attack, or have complex relationships with wellbeing in the context of academe. Although a picture has already been painted about the broad contextual features of academe, each case highlights the specific contextual features of the situation which we argue makes the account worthy of being described as (micro)activism in that setting. The three cases are *"Love* & Kisses", "The Dyslexic Professor" Blog, and "Thank you for revising your manuscript…"*.

"Love* & Kisses"

Empirical work highlights the ways in which the hyper-masculinised environments of academe frame and position behaviour in particular ways (Smith and Ulus, 2019), and is part of how academic work has become increasingly intensified and pressurized. Within this context, written communication is a pervasive part of academic life, and often exploiting the ubiquity and immediacy of emails with teaching, research and management colleagues, students, and other stakeholders. In academe, email can often be depersonalizing for both writer and recipient, and the humanness of the communicators is annulled by bureaucratic expectations and time pressures. However, how these communications are rendered and received are increasingly associated with anxiety and depression in academic workplaces (Kiriakos and Tienari, 2018). Micro-activism here can be articulated as acts which are counter to the hyper-masculinized and intense pace of academic life, for example, attempting to find alternative ways of relating 'with love' *in mind* when interacting (Kiriakos and Tienari, 2018). Although love might be expressed through behavior, the intention is *in mind* and therefore relatively 'hidden'.

We articulate that an act of activism in this context is a male professor who signed his emails with "*Love from Paul**" (a pseudonym) where the '*' pointed to a short explanation of why he did that; that he wanted to refract a collective 'love' with others, an act which was inspired by his colleague that had spent his life trying to facilitate and mediate collective wellness. It was his standard email 'signature' so it appeared in each email, symbolically repeating and reinforcing the message over time, even when he moved institutions. Within the academic environment, it is important that this act was undertaken by someone identifying as male to others (including other males), in a context where such expression of emotion is not necessary welcomed or valued, especially from males (Askins and Blazek, 2017) given the prevalence of male dominance and sexual harassment in academe as well as high profile cases in the media (Keplinger, Johnson, Kirk, and Barnes, 2019). The inclusion of the 'explanation' of what was meant by 'love' in the signature indicated, at least in part, an unease in doing so.

In this way, the intentional act of writing out a compassionate closing of emails may be seen as a form of micro-activism that expresses love and compassion as a form of resistance against the 'emptiness' and impersonal character of automated signature blocks and their symbolic resonance to hyper-efficient, masculinized environments. In the tough and often highly impersonal context of academia, such relationality creates a longing for the personal, which is increasingly beleaguered in academics' lives (Cunliffe, 2018). Conscious acts of

communication with others reframe us, and reframe others, in often subtle and dialogic ways and, as such, can moderate feelings about one's own communication and the way it is received by the reader (Keplinger, Johnson, Kirk, and Barnes, 2019).

Such email styles seem to be a simple and quiet form of non-confrontational activism in terms of location, tone, and intent, and seemingly engage the emotional self, challenge the impersonal banality of email and the 'cold efficiency' of organizational communication. Yet such acts are always contextually located, and indeed, may be so culturally insensitive, that they can become problematic for wellbeing. For example, there is a recent case where a woman wrote a letter to their governmental colleague and ended the letter with an 'x' (signifying a kiss). Although the 'x' countered the expectation of formality and therefore expressing a particular way of relation at work, the 'x' was interpreted as unprofessional and unacceptable, breaking an implicit code of practice, and the story spread across social media generating public expressions of disappointment and shame. To emphasise the point, an email from an academic manager which seemingly asserts a caring for employees' wellbeing (against a norm) can generate a variety of wellbeing effects. This semi-fictional example inspired from our collective practice refers to a period of rapid readjustment due to the COVID-19 pandemic:

> Dear colleagues, Just a brief summer note to you all before the holiday. We in management want to express how proud and impressed we are, and how grateful, for your extraordinary efforts, constructive attitude, creativity and innovation in these tremendously challenging times. This enabled us to convert to online teaching at a moment's notice. We know this has been tough for some of you. Before you go on your well-earned summer break, remember to be good to yourselves and others by taking the time to engage more personally with one another when you meet colleagues online. We really miss seeing you all, we really do. Feel free to email us personally with any concern at all.

The way in which this email is received is entangled with a rich array of contextualities which problematizes how wellbeing can be affected. Indeed, across academe, there have been heterogeneous experiences in relation to the way COVID-19 has impacted academic workloads and the ways in which universities have adjusted workloads, schedules, and compensation for the additional time spent on teaching activity (McKie, 2020). Here, some might read and interpret the email as expressing a genuine and intense, personal caring for colleagues which might generate feelings of *reward and recognition* for the radical adjustment to new ways of works – a driver of wellbeing at work (Lomas, 2019). However, there are many reports in the media about how academics have struggled to work at home and juggle loneliness, children and other caring responsibilities, illness, domestic tasks and other challenges with a brutal workload, and with no institutional support - leaving them to self-manage their own distress (Smith and Ulus, 2019).

Here, people experiencing such challenges in a *specific* context of the organisation and the manager – within a wider trajectory of history and identification (Dwyer, Chang, Hannay, and Algoe, 2019) – might read it as a way of normalizing increased *workloads* and rapid response to *scheduling* (another driver of wellbeing). As such, some may feel a sense of (potentially increased) disconnect with an unethical expression of *leadership,* and a heightened sense of disempowerment (*control*) because of the impossibility and illegitimacy of trying to challenge the 'apparent caring' email. Indeed, the 'caring' communication might even act as a silencing mechanism that disarms and deflects protest and therefore a way for management to strategically displace responsibility for wellbeing (Smith and Ulus, 2019). So although "*Love* & Kisses*" sentiments as a form of micro-activism can be articulated as

positively expressing drivers of wellbeing at work (Lomas, 2019), for example to *lead* the reframing of *relationships* within a particular context, the effects on wellbeing are likely to be multifaceted and complex. This echoes Tausch and Wagner's (2011) notion that activism can generate both positive and negative affect simultaneously.

"The Dyslexic Professor" Blog

Empirical work highlights that people with disabilities in academe do not necessarily disclose, share, or discuss their disabilities, partly because of the vulnerabilities of doing so could implicate job or future career prospects (Elraz, 2017). Indeed, academics may actively hide their disabilities and the significant, related struggles that accompany a lack of workplace adjustment, even in the longer-term (Smith and Ulus, 2019). Such a response is also linked to an expectation that academics, as expert knowledge workers, should be able to competently manage their workloads (Elraz, 2017). As such, evidence paints a picture of academe as a context where perceived *ability* is normatively foregrounded and valued, and dis-ability, struggle and vulnerabilities are hidden because they can expose and precaritise the employment prospects of academics.

In the face of such conditions, we position "*The Dyslexic Professor Blog*" as an example of micro-activism from within academe because (1) its speaks directly counter to the wider cultural norms which are omnipresent across academe in relation to disability and revealing vulnerabilities, and (2) whilst the Blog is open access for the academic world to see, it is using a medium which is not (yet) formally recognised as part of the typical academic apparatus for teaching or research, so it is in this sense relatively 'hidden'. The blog enables immediate publication, without a formal review process, and a general absence of controlled content by any governing body. By using this 'outsider' medium and sharing the content inside of academia, the academic is blending the border between academia and other forms of expression, attempting to dissolve at-least a portion of this rigid boundary. It is also the case that the author also positions the blog in relation to other 'Dyslexia Activists' and explicitly exposes his own and others' fears of disclosing his 'disability' (The Dyslexic Professor, 2017a). The posts in "*The Dyslexic Professor Blog*" explain this from the author's own activist perspective in relation to academe where after:

> 35 years of struggles, achievements and more struggles as I came to realise that dyslexia was not a learning difficulty but a learning difference… *the coping strategies learnt in hostile environments* actually be an advantage? (The Dyslexic Professor, 2016a, emphasis added).

And that:

> I am a survivor of dyslexia… as a dyslexic, *I live in a hostile world full of words and with the constant fear of exposure*. So, to survive each day is a big achievement and far from any notion of public recognition or superhero status (The Dyslexic Professor, 2017a).

So within this context, the professor counters the normative ideas in academe and beyond with a succinct message:

> it's time to rethink our view of dyslexia and focus less on what dyslexic people *can't* do and more on what they *can* do. Yes, I am actually suggesting that we consider dyslexia as a superpower! (The Dyslexic Professor, 2016b, original emphasis).

"*The Dyslexic Professor Blog*" delivers this intention primarily through foregrounding, valuing and expressing *strengths*, or the skills, knowledge, resources and capabilities that a person currently possesses (Lomas, 2019). For example, posts highlight the range of strengths that people with dyslexia often demonstrate, such as the "positive characteristics of my dyslexia: i) environmental scanning, ii) resilience, iii) quick thinking and iv) empathy" (The Dyslexic Professor, 2017b) or "i) problem solving, creativity, innovation skills; ii) big picture, visual, spatial thinking; iii) communicating ideas; iv) empathy, teamworking; v) systems thinking; vi) using assistive technologies; vii) selling the superpowered you!" (The Dyslexic Professor, 2017c). Indeed, he highlights how he himself has embodied these strengths and connects them to wider needs, for example, in the context of the 'resilience' strength, he says:

> Resilience is all about coping with change and new challenges and you simply need buckets of this at the start of a new job. Being a leader sometimes is about making decisions (easy and hard; good and bad!) in a timely manner and, of course, being willing to apologise when you get it wrong! So, quick thinking has been key. (The Dyslexic Professor, 2017b)

The professor also expresses how the disclosure of dyslexia through the Blog has impacted his own sense of wellbeing. Primarily, the blog seems to have released what he calls "the pent-up frustrations and wounds of five decades of learning" (The Dyslexic Professor, 2017d), specifically through this strategic *strengths*-based reframe:

> Having survived my school days and emerged with a deep held belief I am 'thick, 'lazy; and 'stupid', I do know I don't actually have a superpower as such but associating this expression with the positive aspects of my dyslexic thinking, does help be *let go of some of this ingrained negativity*… I do think my dyslexic thinking helps me in all aspects of my work and disclosing I have dyslexia enables me and others to *acknowledge the challenges and promote the advantages*. In my experience, successful modern academics increasingly work in teams and disclosure provides the *opportunity to build neurodiversity* into any team from the outset. (The Dyslexic Professor, 2019, emphasis added).

Though he describes "[c]oming out as a dyslexic has been a truly profound experience" (ibid), and shares that he feels "*liberated* and *empowered* and *connected* to fellow Dyslexic Activists" (The Dyslexic Professor, 2017e, emphasis added). So it seems that focusing on *strengths* through this unrecognised medium has also enabled him to sense control and relationality to others – all drivers of wellbeing at work (Lomas, 2019). Yet at the same time, he also recognises the negative impacts on his own emotion, in relation to the ruminations and reflections about the wider situation, and through witnessing the experiences of others. He says:

> it would be hard to underestimate the sadness I have observed and the release that acknowledging this can bring… and acknowledge the personal damage and resulting sadness inflicted by inappropriate and outdated educational systems… (The Dyslexic Professor, 2017e).

In this example, the micro-activism therefore seemingly, and unexpectedly, created a duality. On the one hand, the professor comes head to head with the rigidity of a controlled and 'outdated' system, which both places him as a renegade figure, himself outside of any system, but also a portal for others who share his profound sadness for a system that caters only to a specific and controlled type of intelligence. Although there have been and are still an increasing number of scholars who wish to do things 'differently' (Gilmore, Harding, Helin and Pullen, 2019), the professor is still in the minority of scholars who uses his own perceived weakness as a way to connect to others and inspire others through his exposure. Yet on the other hand, he is relating not only to other dyslexic activists but to a larger body of scholars who have felt rejected by the traditional norms of academia and find solace and relief in his expression of vulnerability, re-gaining a sense of connection and community through this subtle act of activism. So this example seems to both positively support *strengths* and *relatedness* drivers of wellbeing, but also simultaneously a reminder that the wider system attacks such drivers.

"Thank you for revising your manuscript…"

Empirical work also suggests that the article peer-review process is entangled with the hyper-masculinised environments of academe, including the ways in which submitted articles are judged and the tone in which feedback is given (Smith and Ulus, 2019). Within this process, journal editors have a powerful role to play in managing the relationship between authors, reviewers, and journals for the purpose of knowledge dissemination. This relationship underpins and shapes the scholarly work that appears in the public domain, although little acknowledgement is given to the personal, political, and relational power dynamics associated with editorial work (Anderson, Elliott and Callahan, 2020). Editors can make or break individuals' careers, but they can also make mindful and deliberate choices regarding how they practice editorial work, for example by managing editorial relationships with a developmental intent that recognises the performative context of academic work (Sparkes 2007; Horn 2016). Micro-activism in this context is a push back against individualised performativity (Chory and Offenstein, 2016), in order to move away from the toxic relations of hypercompetitive knowledge production processes (Sparkes, 2007; Anderson, Elliott and Callahan, 2020). Activist editorship in this sense is a practice that is sensitive to the personal, political and relational dynamics of academic work and value systems that shape academic lives and wellbeing. Yet it is also a largely hidden activity, and little is currently written about the experiences of editors in this sense. The following vignette illustrates a case of micro-activist editorship and how it connects with drivers of wellbeing.

A journal editor was formulating a decision letter for a resubmission that had received mixed reviewer responses (rejection, major revision, minor revision). The authors had made few significant changes since the original submission, despite detailed, constructive feedback. Although the reviewers were enthusiastic about the idea and topic, they pointed out that the paper did not live up to academic standards. The editor was dismayed to read this resubmission and its reviews as she had encouraged the first author, at a conference, to submit the original paper. This author was just out of their PhD and, she suspected, revised the paper with very little support from their very experienced co-author (ex-supervisor).

The editor therefore faced a dilemma of *emotions* versus *control*: should she follow journal conventions and reject a paper not likely to 'make it' in the next round or should she consider the context and the impact this rejection might have on a young scholar's career trajectory? Were these guidelines effectively not allowing young scholars the space to learn and develop? How would she feel being complicit in this? On the other hand, from a resources perspective, a third review would involve at least six people - already under pressure in a

creaking system - spending a lot more time on a risky manuscript. Finally, she decided to follow her own driving *values* around mentoring and supporting community newcomers and offered the authors a second major revision.

How then should she word the decision letter to convey both encouragement but also make the authors cognizant of the paper's short comings and satisfy the reviewers? How could she mentor this new writer a little and perhaps indicate to the second author that they needed to do so too? The editor worked on the decision letter for a whole day, calibrating how to be fair to the authors, the reviewers, to her role as steward of the quality mission of the journal and also to her own sense of collegiality and fair play. She toyed with different formulations to convey the message that 'you've got to play the game a bit more'. She tried to compensate for one review's unkind tone and edited it a bit, yet at the same time she tried to convey her respect for the work put into the process by all concerned. Her effort was first recognized by one reviewer who responded by praising the skilfully woven response and then rewarded when the paper was, after two more rounds, finally published.

As this vignette has illustrated, the peer-review process is fraught with *emotions* that are taxing to authors, reviewers, and editors alike. Yet, when delivering feedback within a performative context, such as writing, the emotions of the recipient are too frequently dismissed (Molloy, Noble, and Ajjawi, 2019). Developmental feedback is, thus, a means to manage the emotions of criticism within the hypercompetitive and masculine environment (Smith and Ulus, 2019). Reviewers and editors are nevertheless volunteering their time in service to their fields, whilst performing labour without pay from the publishers (Callahan, 2017), and their goodwill can run thin with the increased pressure for academics to publish.

Because the identities of the reviewers are masked, and there is often very little dialogue in the process, there can be little sense of *control* for the author – a driver for wellbeing at work (Lomas, 2019). The author's fate is in the hand of these anonymous reviewers who may not be empathetic to how their words impact the well-being of the recipient. Further, the developmental feedback approach offers editors some level of *control* over the content of their journals in a publishing context in which an editorship increasingly risks becoming little more than a "traffic controller" (Modarras, 2015).

Authors often have constrained discretion over outlet choices for their publications because of the ubiquity of journal ranking lists as proxies for quality and recognition (Anderson, Elliott, & Callahan, 2020). In such a pressurised, performative system, senior scholars may abuse their positional power to gain authorship credit without providing the substantive guidance that early career researchers need to be successful in the publishing process. This lack of contribution despite the reward of a potential publication shifts the burden of mentorship to the editor and reviewers. Although this can be emotionally wearing for the latter groups, the above case illustrates how activist editorship can model supportive practice to other (senior) members of the community and can also be personally gratifying and deliver positive emotional responses in the longer run.

Discussion and future directions

The cases above contribute to an emerging area of study, that is, the ways in which micro-activism and wellbeing relate when the acts are individualistic and are largely – at least in terms of their activist intent – hidden. Yet the cases also demonstrate that although there are aspects of micro-activism which are hidden, they are not expressed in a social or relational vacuum. Indeed, the cases of micro-activism share a common desire by individuals to re-cast and re-position *relationships*, often using some modicum of *control* that is available to the activists at that time – whether that be asserting through an email signature, through using an open technology, or through translating highly emotional reviews of an article submission. Through this process, these activists can also express *leadership* perhaps around certain *values* they hold, and as such, are able to address a range of drivers of wellbeing at work for themselves. Yet at the same time, the expression of such activist work is not always positive, and there may well be negative (or to some extent mixed) *emotions*, or *relationships* may indeed be compromised or damaged; the activist might be saddened to learn how widespread an issue is (cf. The Dyslexic Professor) or they may be met by unappreciative responses which claim their acts are inappropriate or unprofessional and publically embarrass them (cf. the symbolic Love* & Kisses). So for activists, there seems to be multi-directional relationships between micro-activism and wellbeing at work.

In the same vein, the expression of micro-activism by individuals does not only positively and negatively affect the wellbeing of those expressing it, but may also impact the wellbeing of those experiencing the acts. In these cases, emails expressing love or kisses, coming out as dyslexic, expressing a care for colleagues without structural recognition, and navigating and negotiating reviewer comments, can potentially evoke positive or negative emotions and relationality for those involved. However, problematically, although expressing care might be expressed as an act of micro-activism by those with control – such as managers – some might interpret it as an instrument to normalize a wider structural problem of displacing responsibility for wellbeing from the organisation to the individual (Smith and Ulus, 2019). In this way, and echoing the above discussion, micro-activism can have multi-directional relationships with wellbeing at work because of the material effects it creates through its expression.

Such multi-directional dynamics do not give a definitive conclusion as to the ways in which micro-activism promotes wellbeing in organisations, but they do initiate a more systematic approach to understanding the relationship. As a nascent area of study, the analysis does highlight that micro-activism is not a "petty act" in terms of wellbeing despite it being a relatively hidden 'weapon of the weak', and that there is a complex relationship. As such, there are a number of areas of investigation that would be worthy of further exploration: (1) what are the factors or features of micro-activism which seemingly have the most significant effects on wellbeing, (2) what are the temporal dynamics of wellbeing and micro-activism over time (related to the ways in which others experience and interact with the expression of the acts of micro-activism), and (3) how do the drivers of wellbeing which were seemingly hidden in this chapter operate in micro-activism (such as *reward-recognition*)? Underpinning these questions needs to be a recognition that although micro-activism may not be public and social, it can and does shape the way in which we relate to others and so there are dialogical dimensions and dynamics which connect to a material or imagined sense of person-in-context. This is key to understanding why micro-activism can feel like 1,000 snowflakes rather than a single snowflake when it comes to wellbeing in organisations.

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