

**Activism and Academia, a Double Edged Sword; Challenges Faced by Activist
Researchers**

Evvy A.J. de Joode

Global Responsibility & Leadership, Campus Fryslân, University of Groningen

Bachelor Capstone; Thesis

Supervised by Dr. N.Q. Emlen

05-06-2023



Abstract

This research explores the challenges faced by activist researchers in academia. A literature review establishes key concepts and definitions, followed by the collection and analyses of primary data of four semi-structured interviews with activist researchers in some way affiliated to Western European academia. The findings of this thesis predominantly align with already existing literature, highlighting challenges such as the infringement of academic freedom, peer influence, conflict with academic institutions, high workload, discrepancy in research output, and the devaluation of activist research. However, this research also presents challenges less highlighted throughout literature: e.g. mental health emerged to be a specific challenge for activist researchers. The importance of visibility of activist researchers throughout academia is another finding of this research. The hierarchical nature of academic institutions was a recurring theme throughout the research. Competitive climates and inflexible academic standards discourage activist engagement in academia. The already existing workload for academics, burnout, and the devaluation of non-academic work pose additional obstacles to activist academics. By addressing these challenges, academic institutions can possibly create a more inclusive and supportive environment to activist researchers and their impactful work. Recommendations include reducing hierarchy and dependency in academia, decreasing workload, and recognising the value of non-academic work and publications.

Keyterms: activist research, activism, socially engaged research, challenges, obstacles, academic freedom, devaluation of work, mental health, hierarchy, competition, representation, visibility, ethnography, academic workload, workplace conflict, peer influence.

Acknowledgements

My personal experiences with activism in academia have shaped a large part of how I look at the topic of activist researchers today. I have had the privilege of getting to know several activist researchers throughout my years in Dutch academia and they have inspired and influenced me to look at academic research not only as a way of understanding the world around you, but also as a way to create positive change. I am thankful for all the great impact they have created and continue to create.

In general, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Nick, for without his guidance, patience and kindness throughout this research, I would not have been able to complete it. I would also like to thank him for his inspiring lectures that have sparked my interest in ethnographic research in general and the interplay between activism and academia. I would like to thank all of those who gave me feedback throughout this process in order for me to grow as a researcher. Lastly, I would like to thank Rosalie, Lisa, Mike, and Ilona for their immense support, care, and encouragement.



Introduction

Academia is often seen as a place of objectivity outside the daily political and social spheres in which we all move (Piven, 2010). In more recent years, mainly since the 1960's, there has been a shift towards a more engaged academia where research exists and is used outside of the academic walls. This surge in socially engaged academia has led to a multitude of interesting new opportunities and challenges, amongst which is the increase in socially engaged or activist researchers (Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2020; Fitzgerald, Burack & Seifer, 2010). There are those who wonder whether this rise in social and political engagement should be a desired development, others welcome this phenomenon with open arms (Divinski et. al, 1994). In many instances academia and activism can work really well together, as social movements often gain momentum as they are provided with scientific relevance through research (Maxey, 1999). This works vice versa as well, since lots of research is inspired by social movements and socio-political phenomena. Some researchers even go as far as to say that there is no divide in being a researcher or being a socially-engaged researcher, as being socially engaged is inevitable in their field of expertise (Dincer, 2019; Maxey, 1999).

Whether one welcomes this rise in socially engaged research or not, it is evident that there are various instances where socially engaged academics face severe obstacles in their work as activists and academics. The latest reports commissioned by the European Union (EU) Panel for the Future of Science and Technology show clear numbers on the state of academic freedom of all EU member states. Generally speaking, the report shows an overall decrease of academic freedom. This decrease is slow, yet a troublesome warning to the entire academic community to keep a close eye on whether these infringements do not become more structural. (Panel for the Future of Science and Technology European Parliamentary Research Service Scientific Foresight Unit [European Parliament], 2023; Beiter et al. 2016, p. 328). The protection of academic freedom lays at the ground basis of scientific research. It is one of the main premises on which activist academics rely on in doing their work, often due to the fact their work exists on the margins of the current scientific paradigm or their activism exists in the nondominant political and societal areas (Couture, 2017; Smith & ferguson, 2010). The global trend of decrease in academic freedom is a threat to the very existence of scientific research, but especially to those in academic institutions that are already in precarious/unsafe/unstable situations including those who are in precarious employment, women, people of colour and academics from the global south (Esty et. al, 2005). This decline in academic freedom is not the only obstacle faced by activist researchers, but it does show that the very foundation that should serve to protect them, is turning into an additional threat. In recent years, a researcher's output rate has become increasingly more significant for their career advancements (Flood et. al, 2013). Combining the increased threat of a decrease in academic freedom with the notion that universities seem to base promotions and rewards solely on academic output, often completely ignoring any socio-political engagement related to an academic's work (Couture, 2017). Due to increases in work pressure and stress amongst most academics, being socially engaged outside of working hours has become significantly more difficult (Couture, 2017).

This paper seeks to create a deeper understanding of activist research by outlining the lived experiences of activist academics by answering the following research question: "What



challenges do activist researchers face in combining their activist work and their work as scholars within academia?" The aim is to shed a brighter light on what it means to be an activist and an academic at the same time, and how this combination can be challenging. First, the methodology of the research will be discussed as well as the ethical considerations that were taken into account while conducting this research. Through a narrative literature review, this paper will lay down the ground definitions and key concepts used throughout the paper. Then already existing literature on what challenges researchers will be analysed. Afterwards, the findings of the primary data will be described, compared to the existing data and afterwards discussed. Lastly, the research question will be answered and the paper concluded.



Positionality

As a white woman conducting research on activism in academia, my positionality plays a crucial role in the way my perspectives and understandings of these topics are shaped. It is important to acknowledge the privileges and biases that come with my identity and the potential impact they may have on my research. I recognize that my position as a white researcher affords me certain advantages and opportunities within academic space. Historically, academia has its roots in colonial systems and white supremacy and this has shaped the way academia in the Netherlands has influenced the predominant paradigm of the Dutch academic institutions. Consequently, I am aware that my research is influenced by these power dynamics, dominant narratives, and biases, despite my intention to be as reflective on these as possible. I am dedicated to critically engage with a multitude of perspectives, literatures and narratives, to question my own reference frame to try and minimise my potential biases and interpretations of findings and results.



Key definitions

Activism and social engagement

Thus far, activist researchers and socially engaged researchers have been terms used interchangeably. The next section will elaborate on why these definitions, even though they seem to be fairly different, are in this research used as synonyms. The following section will elaborate on why this decision was made.

According to the Cambridge English dictionary activism is defined as “The use of direct and noticeable action to achieve a result, usually a political or a social one” (2023). Activism imposes new ideas on already existing predominant structures through a variety of powerful actions. It causes structures to step away from their current identities (Svirsky, 2010) Activists are developing the relations between the public and organisations, playing a part in the solutions of societal problems and overall working towards social good and increasing societal standards (Smith & Furgeson, 2010).

Socially engaged research is an umbrella term for a variety of research methods that all make use of collaboration between the public/community and research. The goal of socially engaged research is to improve and understand a certain societal issue or public concern (Barinaga & Parler, 2013; Petras & Porpurus, 1993). Socially engaged research emphasises the importance of a variety of sources for knowledge and insight, coming from both academia and actual lived experiences. Throughout socially engaged research, meaningful and active collaboration is used across all stages of the research process. In this manner, concerns and problems are identified with the public and not imposed on them through hierarchical structures (Couture, 2017). All in all, socially engaged research aims to solve and investigate public concerns by working together with and for the respective communities (Kirsch, 2018).

While these two terms seem to overlap in certain areas, the main difference seems to be the chosen form of action. Where activism predominantly uses direct actions or campaigning, socially engaged research focuses on working with the public on said research. This paper, however, uses these terms interchangeably, since activism in academia is almost always connected to socially engaged research and socially engaged research almost always leads to openly campaigning for a cause through teaching, publishing, etc., and in some cases even direct action (Couture, 2017; Flood et. al, 2013).

Activist research(er)

I acknowledge that social engagement and activism can be defined as two separate ways of achieving social and political change, however, I deem this distinction to be less visible in the realm of academia. I am aware that working with this definition differs from many definitions that have already been given to what activism entails. However, there is no actual consensus on what the boundaries of activism truly are (Bobel, 2007; Smith & Furgeson, 2010). Therefore, this paper defines activist research(ers) as any academic that pushes for social, political, or institutional change that differs from the dominant academic paradigm by means of direct action



or public campaigns through a variety of methods (including traditional academic methods such as: teaching, publishing, or media exposure.)

Different types of activist researchers

Not all academics who fit the above definition of an activist researcher are alike. One key difference is whether researchers are engaged in activism that is not related to their field of study, e.g. a mathematician who is a feminist activist, whereas there are also activist researchers whose work fields are undeniably connected to their activism, an ecologist being a climate activist. In the scope of this paper, the main focus will be on activist researchers whose field of work is directly related to their work as activists.



Literature review

Over the years, academia itself has been the site of activism in several ways. Academia is a site of knowledge production which has been used to ignite social change. Sometimes, academic research itself involves forms of activism or social change (Couture, 2017; Flood et. al, 2013). A more obvious way in which activism finds its place in academia is through progressive teaching and learning strategies. Finally, activism is seen throughout academia when it challenges the academic institutions themselves. Academia also provides ways to support activist academics in their work through means such as, obtaining useful skills (writing, argumentation, public speaking, etc.) and in resources (access to knowledge, activist materials, public credibility, etc.) (Flood et. al, 2013). There are some that argue that the dichotomy between activism and academia should not exist to begin with, especially in fields that are inherently related to social change e.g. feminist studies (Dincer, 2019). Even though academia and activism have been combined by many, it is clear that academics who are perceived as non conformist may receive reprisals both outside and inside the academic institution. This kind of treatment can lead to others refraining from becoming activist researchers and promote the idea of keeping a low profile instead (Flood et. al, 2013). Combining activism and academia is difficult, and throughout their work, activist researchers encounter a variety of challenges. In this literature review, these obstacles are summarised in two different categories trickled down in respective sub-categories, namely: Outside of academic institutions: 1) Backlash from the general public 2) Critique from other activists and research participants; and Inside academic institutions: 1) Infringement of academic freedom 2) conflict with the academic institution 3). High workload and discrepancy in research output 4) Peer influence 5) The devaluation of work. The following literature review aims to give a clear overview of common themes found in literature regarding obstacles activist researchers face.

Obstacles found outside of academic institutions

Any researcher that is socially engaged and participates in public debate is subject to a variety of opinions and ideas. *Backlash from the general public* is therefore not uncommon and the amount of public pressure on academics has drastically increased with the rise of social media (Dej & Kilty, 2023). Olson & LaPoe (2018) found that there is a common notion amongst academics that they should be careful with their online engagement, for professional and employment reasons, with some even referring to self censorship being a means to protect oneself from harassment . Some of the main objectives of the attacks on academics over social



media is to humiliate and scare them, ultimately in the hopes to silencing these, often marginalised, academics (Barlow & Awan, 2016; Dej & Kilty, 2023) Especially women activist researchers, are worried about engaging on feminist topics on social media in fear of harassment and threats (Olson & Lapoe, 2018).

Activist researchers face obstacles that come from a more unexpected corner when *the critique comes from other activists and their own research participants*. Activist researchers find themselves in a peculiar spot trying to mitigate between what is expected from them in scholarly articles and what is expected from them from the community they are socially engaged in. As activist research has a high potential of conflicting with existing academic standards, activist researchers need to find ways to connect two ‘contradicting’ realms. Consequently, one of the main struggles of activist researchers is balancing the work done for institutions (academia, policy makers, etc.) and the actual community they work with and for (Cancian, 1993). While these two do not necessarily have to contradict each other, research participants and activist colleagues can have different expectations from a research outcome than academic institutions. This gap is often bridged by creating multiple outputs that serve different purposes or even by having two entirely different careers, one in academia and one in the field of activism (Cancian, 1993). For example, an academic can choose to both publish a scholarly article while simultaneously publishing or working on a different project focussed on an output that is more radical or activism-oriented. When these gaps are not properly bridged by the activist researcher, critiques are likely to pile up and can lead to less willingness from people to work together with researchers in general (Couture, 2017). The general idea that researchers only ‘take’ from communities and do not ‘give’ back, is something to always take into consideration when doing activist research. Ensuring the community you work for is satisfied with your output, while ensuring academic credibility is one of the main challenges for activist researchers (Flood et. al, 2013).

Obstacles found inside of academic institutions

Academic freedom lies at the heart of scientific research and any academic institution. However, *infringement of this right to academic freedom* happens through a variety of reasons throughout academia. Especially for activist researchers, the protection of this right is extremely important. While most institutions will acknowledge that academic freedom should be and is respected, this does not mean that this always happens in reality (Beloff, 2010). Concerns surrounding the threats on academic freedom have increased with the marketisation of academia and the



increase in diminishing of critical voices (Macfarlane, 2016). Generally speaking, in the context of hierarchical universities, the amount of academic freedom activist scholars have is highly dependent on their academic rank. An important reason for this dependency is the growth of the workforce in academia, with a growing lack of legal protection for academic freedom (Panel for the Future of Science and Technology European Parliamentary Research Service Scientific Foresight Unit [European Parliament], 2023). An increase in a contingent workforce can be seen as a political strategy to minimise radical thought and activism, ultimately weakening academic freedom. Without job security, academics may feel the need to self censorship. While tenured academics generally feel more free to be activistically engaged, there are shared concerns regarding institutional reprisal. Additionally, there are several concerns regarding the pressure for tenured academics regarding the quantity of workload, them being encouraged to not rock the boat, and to not harm the university's reputation (Flood et. al, 2013). The decrease in academic freedom also reflects itself on racial and gendered hierarchies in academic institutions. Particularly Women of Colour reported the most obstacles in exercising their academic freedom in their activist engagements. Their obstacles include bullying from their peers, pressured into conforming to traditional 'white-male' academic output, leading to a higher form of self censorship, consequently leading them to being unsafe in producing activist research (Rangel, 2020).

Academic freedom can, however, not only exist in a theoretical vacuum. On the contrary, it exists in specific institutional conditions. These specific conditions are crucial, since academic institutions carry the responsibility of creating sufficient and safe space for the right to academic freedom to be exercised (Panel for the Future of Science and Technology European Parliamentary Research Service Scientific Foresight Unit [European Parliament], 2023). While the responsibility of this protection lies with academic institutions, the discussions surrounding the topic are always inherently intertwined with broader societal and cultural topics surrounding injustices, and are therefore bound together (Davids & Waghid, 2021). While few academic institutions will actually hinder a researcher from choosing certain research topics, they might be eager to steer them away from certain subjects. This subtle limitation of academic freedom can be found in threats, workplace inconvenience, job insecurity, institutional reprisal, etc (Flood et. al, 2013).

While many academic institutions claim to have academic freedom as one of their core values, this freedom seems to be theoretical and ends when a researcher is actively engaged in research that involves their employer and could put them in a bad light. Activist researchers can



become targets of threats, abuse, silencing, peer pressure, in attempts to steer them away from activism in academia, especially early on in their careers (Flood et. al, 2013). Activist academics may find themselves in *conflict with their academic institutions*. Although attacks and reprisal might not be the obstacles most commonly faced, they can be a significant threat to personal and professional safety (Flood et. al, 2013). A recent increase in new forms of activism is becoming visible with junior researchers more often establishing themselves in unions and entertaining critical discussion with leadership within their institutions about precarious employment, social safety, and general well being (Bengsten, 2021). Additionally, we see an increase in demand for participatory and non-hierarchical academic institutions and communities (Aaen and Nørgard, 2015). Activist researchers report on threats from within their departments when their research does not comply with the “normal” academic standards. The more a researcher seems to be connected to the community they are working with, the heavier the conflict within their academic institutions tends to be. These conflicts are mostly oriented towards the lack of traditional publications and the detachment from academia. In some cases these conflicts result in denying promotions and cutting of networking opportunities (Cancian, 1993).

The high workload faced by academics and *the discrepancy in research output* between two different social worlds, is a common challenge amongst activist researchers. One of the major requirements for academic career advancement is the amount of recognised publications an academic has and whether they have close ties with colleagues and academic departments (Couture, 2017; Flood et. al, 2013). Both these conditions seem to be highly incompatible with activist research. Democratising research with the community members can limit frequent academic publications. Social action slows down the research process in general, as well as adding an additional layer of complexity (Couture, 2017). Additionally, publications outside of academic journals are only accepted if there is sufficient academic output to go with it, leaving activist researchers in situations where they feel forced to either double their output, or leave either activism or academia behind (Cancian, 1993). The issues related to job insecurity and career advancement are increasing in higher education due to two trends. The general increase in junior academics who strive for tenure and the increasing emphasis on research productivity and quantity of output (Rangel, 2020). The expectation for high quantity output can be a challenge as career advancement is highly dependent on publications and activist scholarship is often not of any interest to prestigious journals due to their peer influence and disciplinary expectations (Skinner et. al, 2015). Additionally, as mentioned before, ensuring your



publications are useful to activist movements is difficult to balance with academic publications (Flood et. al, 2013).

Like any other person in any occupation, most academics prefer to have good relationships with their immediate colleagues. If none of these colleagues is involved in activism, one's own activism can create a feeling of otherness. Even when colleagues are tolerant towards one's work, academics might be influenced unconsciously to spend less time on activism, simply since they receive no reinforcement. When colleagues respond negatively to one's activism, the pressure to change behaviour can increase. This *peer influence* is powerful as it is the basis of what makes a satisfying work environment or an unsatisfying/harsh daily life (Flood et. al, 2013).

Academia is often seen as a beacon of objectivity. Being unbiased in research is considered a high good. To some researchers, including activist researchers, being completely unbiased is difficult to maintain due to their own personal experience, the experience of people close to them, or their large involvement in the communities of their research participants. Identity is inherently intertwined with academic writing (Williams, 2006). While this close relationship to a subject is of high importance to being socially and actively engaged, it is sometimes seen as a weakness when it comes to objective writing (Piven, 2010). While there is an ongoing debate on whether scholarly writing needs to be completely unbiased at all times, and whether this is possible to begin with, it is not strange that activist researchers are biased in their works (Koskinen, 2015). When publishing their output, research activists are often subjected to more questions regarding the validity of their results and the general academic quality (Couture, 2017; Flood et. al, 2013). By using non-classical research methodologies, activist researchers find themselves in situations where they have to over-explain the legitimacy of their academic contributions as well as their objectivity (Cancian, 1993). This process can be immensely frustrating and take up a lot of time. Even though the *devaluation of one's work* can happen to any activist researcher, this challenge is a lot more prevalent to activist researchers that are a part of marginalised groups. Especially women of colour often already face these kinds of abuses towards their work, regardless of whether it is activist in nature or not (Etsy et. al, 2005).

It is important to note that many of these challenges seem to be happening at the same time. It is therefore key to keep in mind that activist researchers are facing a multitude of obstacles simultaneously, often from different people. So when looking for ways to combat these obstacles, one must always keep several dimensions in mind and understand that research activism does not exist in a vacuum only within academia and yet also not in the vacuum of



activism either. This interplay between the two fields is inherent to understanding the obstacles and possible solutions for activist researchers.



Methodology

The data that will be collected for this research is descriptive in nature and gathered through answers given in 4 interviews as well as observations done by the researcher. Through a literature review a collection of secondary data will be used to create an initial understanding of the broader aspects and topics of this research.

Qualitative research is the best choice in trying to answer this paper's research question as it is important to map out individual experiences to gain a better and deeper understanding of lived experiences from academics. It is also important to shed a light on and give room to the nuances that are easily overlooked (Sofaer, 1999). Qualitative data provides the researcher with the possibility to gain knowledge through an insider perspective. This is, amongst others, a standard methodology used in the field of social sciences and anthropology (Gobo, 2005).

For the basis of this paper a literature review was conducted. Via various online libraries, including University of Groningen SmartCat and google scholar, secondary data was collected, read, and analysed to be used as a source of information to base the further research on. The literature review was written from March 2023 till June 2023. This research uses both peer reviewed papers as well as non-peer review papers such as governmental documents and news articles. The search was not limited to a specific timeframe of publication dates as this would limit the accessible data on the topic as well as not give a clear insight into change through time. Lastly, additional literature was found by following references from other texts.

Primary data were collected through a set of 4 interviews. The interviews were conducted over the online platform Zoom. Interview length varied between 50 to 70 minutes. All interviews were held in English. All participants have been academics for a minimum of 10 years. All participants are currently part of, or have been a part for most of their academic career, in Western European academia. The Participants were found through a variety of methods. I did an open call in my own network by posting on my social media accounts. Furthermore, I asked academics within my network to share the call for participants with people they thought fit the participant description of an activist researcher. The participants, as common in qualitative research, were picked based on their qualities that fit the participant description (Back & Collins, 2022; Etikan et. al., 2015). This use of purposive sampling was particularly fit for this research as time and resources were limited. Furthermore, one participant was found through the snowballing effect (Audemard, 2020), as one of the participants reached out to their own network and brought forth a new participant. The interview methods used do not allow the data to be generalisable for the entire population, however bring a deeper insight to certain aspects and experiences that tend to get overlooked of the research participants (Etikan et. al., 2015). This way of recruiting research participants has a strong risk for biases as the participant pool is rather small and mostly from the same circle. I acknowledge that the participants in this paper are not representative of the entire group of activist researchers, let alone academia, but nonetheless provide essential insights into the topic. It is important to note that not taking this data into account simply because the participant pool is small, could diminish the lived experiences of activist researchers and result in important data being overlooked. Additionally, all research participants were researchers and activists in what are considered to be



progressive fields. Further research is needed to see whether activists and researchers in other ideological idioms experience similar challenges in their work or encounter different obstacles.

The primary data was analysed by the use of qualitative methods. This was done by coding the outcomes of the interviews by looking for similarities in the answers provided by the research participants and dividing them by topic or theme (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The interviews conducted were loosely semi structured as a small set of questions was pre-determined while leaving room for spontaneous questions to emerge and questions to be left out when deemed less relevant to the current conversation flow. An interview guide was created to present a clear overview on the pre-determined questions and is available as appendix 1. By active participation in the interview dialogue, the researcher aimed to engage in informal dialogue to create an open atmosphere (Gobo, 2005). Research bias was limited by careful reflection and analysis of the original interview guide as well as a thorough analysis of the interviews after they were conducted. In this analysis, I looked for potential priming or biased questions in order to properly reflect on these in the discussion part of this paper.

This research has been approved per the standards of the Campus Fryslân ethics committee and is therefore up to the ethical research standards of the University of Groningen. Since this research involves academics who are in dependent relationships with their employers e.g. universities or research institutions, it is important to fully ensure the privacy and anonymity of all research participants. This is done by obscuring any data that could be used to trace back to single individuals, as well as any potential relation to the participant and their employer. Since this study includes discussions revolving around activism in its broadest sense, a variety of sensitive topics has been discussed. These vary from mentions of bullying, discrimination, and struggles with mental health, as well as other sensitive topics. It has been made clear to all participants that they were allowed to withdraw from answering any and all questions for whatever reason, or even stop the interview altogether. Before partaking in this research, all participants received a sheet containing the general information of the research and interview as well as asked to sign a consent form. These documents can be found in appendix 2 and 3 respectively. Before the beginning of any interview, I discussed any and all ethical concerns and questions regarding the interview, to ensure all participants were properly informed.



Findings and discussion

The following section presents the research findings of the conducted interviews. The aim of this section is to clearly lay out and describe the challenges the interview participants have experienced as activist academics. These challenges are divided in commonly found themes and topics. However, as mentioned before in the literature review, it is important to keep in mind that these themes overlap in certain aspects as none of these challenges present themselves in a vacuum and are often inherently intertwined with one another. Therefore, this section also aims to discuss these challenges in a broader sense by comparing them to the literature and analysing them through a more overarching lens. Lastly, this section will also provide some recommendations to the challenges found throughout this research.

- Hierarchy in academia; job dependency

All participants touched upon challenges related to hierarchy within academia and the job insecurity this creates. Participants refer to being disposable or recognising that their outspokenness makes them easily replaceable by another academic in the same field who is less critical and less socially engaged. A big obstacle that is pointed out by one of the interviewees is the fact that within universities people are dependent for their job on one or two individuals in the hierarchy above them. This leaves these individuals in a powerful position in determining the trajectory of the careers of the people in their department. Another participant noted that when activist researchers start questioning the power structures within universities it is likely that they will be outcast, since there are many academics in the same field who are not considered troublemakers. This idea of being easily replaced or discharged seems to create a feeling of having to find a way not to sound too radical in what activist researchers want to work on. Since they are not only highly dependent on the people above them, but also on funding for their research to ensure publications which are fundamental to the survival of their careers.

This feeling of being easily replaceable or being discharged seems to be more prevalent early on in academic careers. All participants touch upon the notion that they were less activistically involved earlier on in their careers. One participant called the precarious employment in one's early career stages suffocating, and not providing any freedom in expressing oneself freely. Another participant noted that standing up for yourself is easier later on in your career than at the beginning. They stated that academia's hierarchy often made them question their own capabilities, so only through years of experience did they gain enough confidence to speak up. It was also noted that, throughout time one is more likely to be exposed to injustices, and the longer one stays in academia, the more one is exposed to these things happening. This combination of exposure and gained experience provides academics with the possibility of becoming more activistically engaged, and also possibly creating more friction by speaking out.

Additionally, another participant noted that early on in their career, they felt the need to prove that they could adhere to the Western European standards of science, operating within the narrative that the traditional European way of doing research was the only "proper" way. This resulted in them feeling disconnected from research and experiencing a mismatch between



what they wanted to do in research [socially engaged research] and what they thought research standards needed to be.

Participants noted that additionally to the precarity of their jobs early on in their careers, also resulted in an existential fear. For people without full citizenship/migrants, losing one's job also meant losing visa privileges. This resulted in a fear of speaking up and a decrease in entertaining activism as it could possibly lead not only to losing one's job, but ultimately to losing one's life as they knew it as well. While this fear is not completely gone, this does become less prevalent when reaching tenured positions.

- Infringement of academic freedom

Two participants mentioned a severe infringement of their academic freedom by academic institutions related to their activist research. Participants describe severe threats from their bosses as well as active disruption of their academic research and careers. One participant mentioned that the university tried to shut down their research completely and urged them to destroy the already gathered data. Additionally, this participant was asked to sign a nondisclosure agreement, and after refusing to do so receiving even more threatening emails. The other participant mentioned that they feel like for an academic institution it is often easier to get rid of an activist researcher than of the problem they are shedding light on. They report on being checked more regularly after publishing activist work and being controlled more in what was allowed to be researched and what was not. This participant states that by doing so the academic institutions set an example to other academics not to start activist research themselves and a way to undermine solidarity amongst colleagues. Both participants mention that they think this challenge would have been less prevalent if their activism was not related to academia itself.

- Competitive structure and demanding workload in academia

Three participants touched upon the competitive nature of academia and its institutions. One participant specifically mentioned seeing a difference between competitiveness in Western European context compared to Eastern European context. They experienced the Western European academic climate to be more aggressive and competitive, and generally speaking to be more male dominated. One participant specifically mentioned that academics are often already overworked with little to no boundaries set for actual working hours. They touch upon the challenge of being able to see activist research as work, and therefore figuring out a work life balance. They mention that there is this culture within academia that supports overworking oneself under the idea that academic work is of "too high of an importance". The participant deems this to be a very toxic working environment. They state that the university has a very strong gaslighting mechanism in which nothing a researcher does is good enough, which always pushes them to work harder, and to keep on publishing without taking a proper break from your previous project. The participant states that this is humanly impossible, yet the norm amongst academics. They also note that this challenge of balancing work life is even worse amongst activist researchers since their work always has an immense sense of urgency to it. They add that rest is not seen, because the institution is able to move on to the next researcher



who is willing to work harder, once you stop delivering this high quantity of acknowledged publications, leaving activists in even bigger challenges having to invest more time in balancing their work output for both activism and academia.

Another participant shared this idea that the main focus of academia is currently publication output oriented and only focuses on quantity instead of quality per se. They stress that in order to secure your career one needs to keep on delivering publications. When one has to keep on delivering it is almost impossible to keep on creating meaningful activist research or research that has social impact. They state that right now it feels like academia has become a space where one just has to publish for publishing sake.

- Questioned on academic capability and integrity

All interviewees report on being questioned on their academic performance, integrity, and biases, mostly by other academics, as a result of their activist engagement within academia. Participants elaborated that this questioning is amplifying already existing biases in academia related towards their gender, race, background or a combination of these.

Participants reported not wanting to use the label of activist or activist researcher because it has been used to diminish and discredit their academic work. One participant stated that there is a significant difference between doing activist research in the Western European context than in the Latin American context (the region this participant is from). They stated that in the Western European context they had to convince people their academic work was not only advocacy for social change but also scientific research that could “live up” to European scientific standards. This convincing needed to be done to a higher extent compared to when talking with Latin American colleagues. Their work often was discredited as too journalistic and containing too much advocacy, and it took years of practising and advice from other activist researchers to find a balance between being able to do meaningful activist research and adhering to the standards that are set in the common European scientific paradigm. They expressed that they feel like it is impossible to avoid being questioned on your work.

Another participant noted that being a woman of colour, her academic contributions are often already doubted based on biases people have against her. This bias already happens before she becomes activistically engaged, but is enhanced because her research is activist. She reports on being told that she should not want to be an activist researcher. Her research automatically becomes labelled as an opinion or too radical once a normative stance is taken. Which is dangerous, according to the participant, since academic research that receives the label of opinion, conspiracy, or radical, automatically is not valued as academic anymore even though it is.

- Activism is not appreciated in academia

All participants responded saying that they believe their activism is not appreciated within academia. All participants referred to academic institutions trying to retain the status quo and activism therefore holding no valid place in academia. Two participants pointed out that activism



that takes place outside of academia is, however, more accepted than activism within academic institutions themselves. One participant stated that whether their activism was appreciated or not also depended on whether their research was seen as adding to a current “popular” societal debate. While two of the participants state that this lack of appreciation has led to them moving their activism to outside of their academic working hours, one participant mentioned that this is impossible as they see their work as an academic inherently intertwined with their activism.

Multiple participants noted that there is a predominant narrative within academia that states that you have to choose between being an academic or being an activist, and that being both is not an actual option. When asked if the participants felt like their activism is appreciated within academia, two participants responded that it would depend on who you would ask. They were very clear in stating that people in powerful positions were not happy with their activism. One participant stated they believe that very few people in power actually still care about the academic community and if they would accept activism in any form, they would only accept activism through their own official channels. Any activism that is too disruptive or which they are not able to properly control is unacceptable to those in academia trying to maintain the status quo. The second participant, stating that it depended on who you asked, noted that they did not have anyone telling them that social injustice should not be researched. The participant stated that “hot societal topics” surrounding social justice did receive funding and there are chances to do meaningful research in those cases. However, they also stated that in those instances, these fundings create a false sense of acceptance to this kind of research, since it is expected of you to do research which has a societal impact, but within certain boundaries. You cannot be too much of an activist, trouble maker, or question the institutions too much. They stated this kind of funding does create some sense of acknowledgement for activist research, but simultaneously the fear of too much disruptions still exists in academia.

All participants mentioned possible loss of their job as a consequence of activism not being appreciated in academia. One participant specifically mentioned that they were told to just “forget about fairness” if they wanted to survive in academia. They reported on their career being stifled after becoming more activist and people cutting collaborations with them. Additionally, another participant stated they felt like academia severely punishes activists. By simply being branded as an activist they become seen as the problematic person, which they related to possibly ending in material consequences such as losing one’s job.

Another participant explained that since academia is not made for activism, activist researchers are looked at with suspicion. They elaborated stating that this is because they show that they understand what the standard of a “proper” academic is supposed to be [non activist] and yet they choose something different than the norm. This participant states that his kind of choice is perceived by others as unruly, defiant, and threatening.

One participant specifically expressed they would not recommend any other activist researchers to necessarily combine their activism with their work in academia, even if it is related to your academic field of expertise. Instead they do their activist work outside of academic working hours, with their own resources. They explained this is the only way for them to feel safe in being an activist researcher because then the university cannot control what one does and does



not research. They felt like “either you separate the two, or you get in trouble”. They expressed that this does form more challenges for them because they feel forced to sacrifice the already limited time they have after work, working on research they should be doing on the payroll of the university. Additionally, they are limited in their resource accessibility when moving their activism to the private sphere.

One participant again noted that there is a difference in appreciation in Western European academia and academia in Latin America. In the Latin American context, research is almost automatically connected to social change, and this feels like the norm. This idea of doing research to create impact is way more common compared to the Western European context.

Two participants state that their activism does get supported via academia through different ways. One participant mentioned feeling privileged to be able to use their academic resources for their activism engagement. Another participant mentioned that their activism gets informed through their academic research and vice versa.

- Do not feel supported by other academics/colleagues

All participants stated that they did not always feel supported by other academics in their activist work. The participants mentioned that the lack of other activists within academic institutions creates a sense of otherness, especially in combination with the invalidation of the participant's work. One participant stated they often received unfriendly reactions from colleagues. They report on being told, amongst other phrases, “just shut up and do your work” and “who do you think you are?”. They reported on colleagues openly telling others they would refuse to work with them. Another participant reports on colleagues telling them “you should have known you would face consequences for doing this kind of [activist] work”. The participant remarks that these kinds of comments are frustrating to hear, because they feel that these same academics often do talk about (in)justice, but then give these kinds of comments to colleagues who actually take action. Another participant states that they have been asked by colleagues why they were attending activist actions. Further stating that as an academic they should not have been there as their job is to simply analyse injustices. The participant notes that this kind of advice would often be given to them under the notion of only trying to help them not to “ruin their career”.

Two participants touch upon the notion that the support they do receive in academia often comes from students, not other academics. One of these participants feels that the academic community is very hostile towards activism, even within the more politically active parts of the community. This participant touches upon the fact that academics like talking about social issues but when they would raise the idea of doing activism this was pushed away. After mentioning activism as an option to engage in, they report being made fun of, laughed at, gaslighted, their work being undermined by colleagues, being made feel stupid, and sometimes even work being sabotaged. The second participant who mentioned support mostly coming from students within academia, also mentioned that when support comes from other academics, these academics are often from marginalised groups themselves and act in a form of solidarity.



Two participants mentioned that colleagues showed signs of fear to be associated with them. One of them reported that colleagues would show private support to them, but would not openly talk about the activist work the participant was doing. This left the participant doubting how much support they actually had amongst their colleagues. The second participant stated that once the university branded them as a problematic person, colleagues and even friends would start distancing themselves from them, because they did not want to be associated with the participant and their work.

Two participants noted that even a small bit of support from direct colleagues can make a big difference. One participant mentioned that it made a huge difference to them that their direct manager is very supportive. However, this simultaneously means that they are worried about how this might change if this person leaves the position they are currently in. This same participant stated that being able to trust even one or two people in a department, creates some feeling of safety and support to do their activist work. The second participant who touched upon this topic, stated that their perception of this challenge changed over time. They stated they used to find academia very restrictive and exclusive, but changed their mind on this when they realised that they have received a lot of support from other academics throughout their career. They stated that there will always be at least one person that is willing to support you. They noted that this can even be a person in a position of power who is willing to use their privileges to help activist researchers. The participant noted that this support does not come out of nowhere, but that it is often based on relationships of mutual trust and respect. This participant also stressed the importance of having a network of support around you in academia, since, according to them, academia often makes you feel like you are not good enough, especially as an activist researcher. Without an active network, these feelings are difficult to deal with.

- Lack (of visibility) of activist researchers

All participants state that they have experienced a lack of activist researchers within Western European academic institutions; or at least a lack of visibility thereof. Two participants specifically mentioned that when they started their career they were not necessarily aware of any activist researchers in their surroundings. One of these participants stated they did not feel like Activism, referring to direct action, happens in academia amongst academics, stating that “everyone is so silent”. Additionally, they stated that only once they needed support from activist academics and started actively looking for them because of that, were they able to find them. But this route is always via other people. They describe having to find activist researchers almost feeling like an “underground” scene, a parallel world to regular academia in which you need to find your way. Having found other activist academics did create a sense of community for this participant. The second participant who stated they did not see activist academics in their surroundings also suggested that when you start looking for them, you can find them everywhere. Once you get through this search, you actually realise there is a lot going.

One participant pointed out that by reading the work of other activist researchers that were successful in academia, inspired them on how to do activist research themselves. Finding successful activist scholars helped in gaining confidence that activist research is possible within



academia and that it is possible to be emotionally connected to research and still be accepted according to the standards set in Western European academia.

One participant pointed out that the most activist researchers they know are actually not fellow academics, but students. They state that as an academic, people will always have to compromise on their activism in some way, in order to survive academia. This participant added on that the most critical activists get filtered out by the institutions even before they arrive in permanent positions at the university. To them, this is a major challenge for activist researchers, as they need to find a way through not being filtered out by the system before arriving to a non precarious position. And even when having arrived at a better job position, they always keep on wondering how long they can continue to do their activist work the way they want to do it.

- Balancing activist output with academic output

Two participants mentioned that their activist research projects were not taken into consideration as publication within academia. One participant clearly states that the only publications that are appreciated are peer reviewed publications. They mention that through this process a lot of critical and activist thought is filtered out of academia. They further elaborate that the journals that are most accepted or appreciated are almost always located in the global north and journals located in the global south are nowhere near being appreciated as much as those in North America and Europe. They pointed out that through this colonial system, activist thought is undermined. They mentioned peer review being in place to ensure scientific knowledge, yet because of it, science becomes homogeneous to the dominant scientific paradigm. They mention that there are economical and political reasons to isolate and discredit political activist research through this process.

One participant mentioned that their work publication and work outside of academia was not taken into consideration when applying for jobs within academic institutions even though the publications and work was related to their field of study. They state that at some point they neglected writing for academic publications because they wanted to do more fulfilling work that would relate better to the activist communities they worked with. They mention that neglecting academic publications is now hindering them in advancing their career in academia as their publication outside of academic journals are not valued as much, even though the work is rooted in scientific thought. They clearly state that work that is not peer reviewed or not written in English is significantly less taken into consideration. This participant mentions that even though their work was fulfilling, they feel the need to create a better balance between their non academic and academic output.

One participant mentioned that in activist work they were not always immediately accepted by the community they were doing research with due to the fact they were also an academic researcher. They stated that building a relationship with any community is built over time and that this is always a learning process. They touch upon their struggle in engaging people outside of academia in their research and ensuring that it would not be exploitative. They state that the power dynamic between the researcher and the participants has always been a challenge for them as discomfort is experienced from this power imbalance. They stated that



only through gaining experience, they learned how to deal with these challenges in a better way. They also noted that by having created a community around them with activist researchers they have been able to talk about ethical research methodology, creating more space for learning to deal with these challenges.

- Mental health

All participants stated that being an activist researcher has an impact on your mental health. One participant mentions that having to deal with harassment and threats resulting from their activist work has resulted in them having to be on sick leave, dealing with burnout and trauma. This participant noted that even though activist research is rewarding, it comes with having to pay the price with your own mental health. Additionally, they reported having to deal with feelings of shame regarding their activist research, because they were made to feel like they had to hide their work away. Another participant also stressed the consequences of activist research on your physical and mental well being as a result of the existential fear and isolation activist researchers face. Another participant noted that with activist researchers not being appreciated and punished for their work in academia, this creation of a fear culture results in isolation and not knowing who to trust. They note that this has severe impacts on one's mental health. They stated that the support they did receive was life saving to them.

Another participant mentioned that being an activist researcher requires a lot of extra work. This brings an additional challenge on how to continue being able to do impactful research without sacrificing one's mental health as a result of being overworked. They state that they had to learn how to be strategic and protect themselves from letting their ideological beliefs affect their mental health. Two participants mention they receive harassment over social media channels. Though they did not elaborate on this aspect too much, they did mention that this added an additional layer of stress to their lives.

Generally speaking, most findings were in line with the literature review as they touched upon all challenges described in the literature review. Some challenges were mentioned more extensively than others, like the infringement of academic freedom, peer influence, conflict with academic institutions, discrepancy in research output and high workload, and the devaluation of work. The challenges related to backlash from the general public and critique from research participants, were mentioned throughout the interviews, they were significantly talked less about than the challenges found within academic institutions. It is not clear whether this is because participants experience these challenges less, or whether the research topic and questions partially primed the participants in thinking more within academic boundaries. Further research needs to be done to create a more in depth understanding of the challenges faced outside of academic institutions.

The literature did not specifically touch upon the consequences for activist researchers of mental health being a specific challenge. While these consequences are implied throughout the literature, it is important to see that the participants specifically mention and elaborate on their mental health being an important challenge for them. Additionally, the focus that was put on the importance of visibility throughout the interview was significantly bigger than in the literature



review. While the significance of peer influence and support was made clear, the participants stressed that being surrounded by other activist researchers and, thereby having more representation, is key for building support systems and networks, creating a space in which everyone feels safer to engage in activist research.

This idea of activist researchers being less visible is supported by the theme of hierarchy and dependency in academia that spreads itself throughout different themes in the findings. The current hierarchical systems might even hinder or scare academics away from being activistically engaged, as it filters out activists before they properly enter the system, and due to the immense workload in academia, activists leave. This workload is predominantly created in academia due to the institution's high level of competitiveness. This element of competition combined with the current hierarchical structures within academia, creates a sense of job insecurity and an environment that leaves little room for being critical or challenging the status quo. Invalidation of academic work through the current academic paradigm based on pure objectivity is devaluing and discrediting academics who use activist and socially engaged methods to produce academic research. The rigidity of what is accepted as academic work and what is not, results in certain work being valued above other types of research and knowledge systems. Further research needs to be done to map out to what extent hierarchy and dependency within academia contribute to the lack of (visibility) of activist researchers in academic institutions.

The current workload amongst research academics might be a hurdle for some researchers to even engage in activism. With the notion that activist research carries a feeling of higher urgency, the additional stress that comes with it, might be a factor that scares academics away from activist engagement. Activist burnout¹ is a phenomenon that is already on the radar in many social movements. This phenomenon results in many activists having to take a step back from work, while additionally, many in academia already experience a work life filled with unbalanced workloads. Activist research can have a severe impact on one's mental and physical well being, adding additional stress to the research. Furthermore, when work outside the scope of academic publications is not taken into account in the furthering of one's academic career, an activist researcher might feel the need to produce double the work. While combining the two is possible, this process might be difficult as the activist part of the research might leave the work's overall academic value to be questioned. Further research needs to be done to see whether the already existing workload of academics withholds them from further engagement in activism and whether a combination of activism and academia leads to quicker burnouts and ultimately to less visibility of these types of academics.

Any concrete recommendations are hard to provide, since this research is not generalisable. Potential recommendations are provided, but all of these recommendations require further research.

1. Finding ways to create less hierarchical and dependent structures within academia.
2. Decreasing the academic workload to decrease levels of competition and create more

¹ Refers to the stress and unsustainable workload that comes with activist engagement (Cox, 2011)



freedom in pursuing activist research. Critically reflect on the normalisation of overworking in academia.

3. Allow the option for researchers to create publications and work outside of academia to be recognised as valuable work. Create less rigidity in publication standards. Allowing for academic output to be understandable for a broader audience saves activist researchers time in having to produce two outputs instead of one. Creating more leniency in what is considered to be inside of the spectrum of academic output can create a better working environment for activist researchers.



Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has tried answering this paper's research question by shedding light on lived experiences from activist researchers by laying out the challenges they face within academia. The findings of this thesis are mostly aligned with the existing literature on the topic, highlighting challenges such as the infringement of academic freedom, peer influence, conflict with academic institutions, high workload, discrepancy in research output, and the devaluation of work. Nevertheless, certain challenges that were mentioned in the literature, such as backlash from the general public and critique from other activists and research participants, received less attention throughout the interviews. This suggests further need for research to understand the experiences of activist academics outside of institutions.

A notable finding of this thesis was the identification of mental health as a specific challenge for activist researchers, as this was a dimension that was not as present throughout the literature review. The participants also highlighted the importance of the visibility of activist researchers in academia, stressing the need for a supportive network to create a safer space for activism in academia. An important theme throughout the findings were the hierarchical and dependent basis of academia, which may discourage academics to engage in activism and subsequently leading to less visibility of such researchers. This hierarchical nature of academia also creates a competitive climate and inflexible academic standards, possibly limiting critical thinking and challenging the status quo. This rigidity also devalues activist research, undermining diverse knowledge systems and different ways of research methodologies. This calls for further exploration of the relation between hierarchy and dependency on the visibility of activist researchers in academia.

This research also highlights the potential influence workload of academics has on activist research. The urgency associated with academic research, in addition to the already existing workloads and stress, may discourage academics from getting engaged. Combining activism and academia may create additional burdens on researchers, especially when their activist work is not deemed valuable or not recognised when trying to advance in a career. This relationship between the academic workload, burnout, and what this does to the presence of activist researchers in academia, needs further research.

While concrete recommendations are hard to provide given the non-generalisable nature of this thesis, several points call for potential improvements. These include a call for less hierarchical and dependent structures in academia, reducing academic workload, reducing aspects of competition, and creating flexibility in non-academic publications. It is important to note that these recommendations require further research to properly estimate their effectiveness and feasibility. However, by being more aware of these challenges and trying to mitigate them, academic institutions can try to create a more inclusive and fostering environment for activist researchers and their impactful work.



References

activism. (2023). <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/activism>

Audemard, J. (2020). Objectifying contextual effects. The use of snowball sampling in political sociology. *Bulletin of Sociological Methodology/Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique*, 145(1), 30-60.

Barinaga, E., & Parker, P. S. (2013). Community-engaged scholarship: Creating participative spaces for transformative politics. *Tamara Journal of Critical Organisation Inquiry*, 11(4), 5.

Beiter, K.D., Karran, T. and Appiagyei-Atua, K (2016). Academic Freedom and Its Protection in the Law of European States Measuring an International Human Right. *European Journal of Comparative Law and Governance*, 3, 254-345.

Beloff, M. J. (2010). Academic Freedom-rhetoric or reality. *Denning LJ*, 22, 117.

Bobel, C. (2007). 'I'm not an activist, though I've done a lot of it': doing activism, being activist and the 'perfect standard' in a contemporary movement. *Social movement studies*, 6(2), 147-159.

Cancian, F. M. (1993). Conflicts between activist research and academic success: Participatory research and alternative strategies. *The American Sociologist*, 24(1), 92–106. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02691947>

Cann, C., & DeMeulenaere, E. (2020). *The activist academic: Engaged scholarship for resistance, hope and social change*. Myers Education Press.

Couture, S. (2017). Activist Scholarship: The Complicated Entanglements of Activism and Research Work. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 42(1), 143–147. <https://doi.org/10.22230/cjc.2017v42n1a3107>

Cox, L. (2011). How do we keep going? Activist burnout and personal sustainability in social movements.

Davids, N., & Waghid, Y. (2021). *Academic Activism in Higher Education: A Living Philosophy for Social Justice*. Springer Nature.



Dinçer, P. (2019). Being an insider and/or outsider in feminist research: Reflexivity as a bridge between academia and activism. *MANAS Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 8(4), 3728-3745.

Divinski, R., Hubbard, A., Kendrick Jr, J. R., & Noll, J. (1994). Social change as applied social science: Obstacles to integrating the roles of activist and academic. *Peace & change*, 19(1), 3-24.

Esty, J., Burton, A., Bunzl, M., Kaul, S., & Loomba, A. (2005). *Postcolonial studies and beyond*. Duke University Press.

Fitzgerald, H., Burack, C., Seifer, S. D., & Votruba, J. (2010). Handbook of engaged scholarship. *Handb. of Engaged Scholarsh.*, 1, 1-460.

Flood, M., Martin, B., & Dreher, T. (2013). Combining academia and activism: common obstacles and useful tools. *The Australian Universities' Review*, 55(1), 17–26. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1004394.pdf>

Gobo, G. (2005, September). The renaissance of qualitative methods. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (Vol. 6, No. 3).

Kirsch, S. (2018). *Engaged anthropology: Politics beyond the text*. Univ of California Press.

Koskinen, I. (2015). Researchers Building Nations: Under what conditions can overtly political research be objective?. *Recent developments in the philosophy of science: EPSA13 Helsinki*, 129-140.

Maxey, I. (1999). Beyond boundaries? Activism, academia, reflexivity and research. *Area*, 31(3), 199-208.

Olson, C. S. C., & LaPoe, V. (2018). Combating the Digital Spiral of Silence: Academic Activists Versus Social Media Trolls. In *Springer eBooks* (pp. 271–291). Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72917-6_14

Panel for the Future of Science and Technology European Parliamentary Research Service Scientific Foresight Unit [European Parliament]. (2023). *State of play of academic freedom in the EU Member States Overview of de facto trends and developments* (PE 740.231). European Parliament. Retrieved May 17, 2023, from



[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/740231/EPRS_STU\(2023\)740231_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/740231/EPRS_STU(2023)740231_EN.pdf)

Petras, E. M., & Porpora, D. V. (1993). Participatory research: Three models and an analysis. *The American Sociologist*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02691948>

Piven, F. F. (2010). Reflections on Scholarship and Activism. *Antipode*, 42(4), 806–810. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2010.00776.x>

Rangel, N. (2020). The Stratification of Freedom: An Intersectional Analysis of Activist-Scholars and Academic Freedom at U.S. Public Universities. *Equity & Excellence in Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2020.1775158>

Smith, M. F., & Ferguson, D. P. (2010). Activism 2.0. *Handbook of public relations*, 395-408.

Sofaer, S. (1999). Qualitative methods: what are they and why use them?. *Health services research*, 34(5 Pt 2), 1101.

Svirsky, M. (2010). Defining activism. *Deleuze Studies*, 4(supplement), 163-182.

Williams, B. T. (2006). Pay Attention to the Man Behind the Curtain: The Importance of Identity in Academic Writing. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*. <https://doi.org/10.1598/jaal.49.8.7>



Appendix

Appendix 1 Interview guide

Interview guide capstone project

Evy A.J. de Joode

Interviews will be conducted in a semi-structured way.

Before start of the interview

1. Has carefully read the information sheet
2. Have filled out the consent form
3. Feels comfortable (a private setting, or if wished for a specific setting or in presence of another person)

Introduction

Before the interview begins, we will start off with introductions and some further explanation on the research and the capstone project. Then some Practicalities will be discussed:

1. The participant can refuse to answer any and all questions without any consequences or questions asked. If requested, the entire interview can be cancelled at any moment in time.
2. Is the participant okay with the interview being recorded? The recording will only be used for research purposes (the making of transcriptions). All information will be completely anonymised. Only the researcher will have access to this information.
3. Does the participant have any questions or concerns before starting the interview?

Introductory questions

1. Where are you from?
2. What is your age?



3. For how long have you been working in academia?

Interview questions:

1. Could you describe your work field or field of study?
2. Could you describe the field/topic you are socially/activistly engaged with?
3. How do you feel your activism and academic field are related to each other, if at all?
4. Could you describe to me how you combine your academic work with activism?
5. How and why did you become interested in activism?
6. Could you describe what it is like to be both socially engaged/activistic and an academic?
7. Do you feel like your activism is appreciated in academia and vice versa?
8. What would you say are the main challenges as an activist researcher?
9. When your career in academia began, were there many people in the field who were also activists/socially engaged researchers?
10. Did you plan on your work having influence on activism/social engagement?
11. Do you feel supported by other academics in your work as an activist researcher?
12. Is your employer aware of your social engagement/activism?
13. Is there something the university could do to value your activism? Is there something else the university could do?
14. Is there anything we did not touch upon you would still like to talk about?



**Appendix 2 Information sheet for this research in template as provided for use by the
Campus Fryslân Ethics committee**

INFORMATION SHEET PARTICIPATION OF RESEARCH

Researcher: Evy A.J. de Joode (she/her)
Supervisor: Dr. N. Q. Emlen (he/him)

University of Groningen, Campus Fryslân
Bachelor Thesis
'Activist Researchers; challenges in the academic field'

Dear,

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research. This letter explains what the research entails and how the research will be conducted. Please take time to read the following information carefully. If any information is not clear kindly ask questions using the contact details of the researcher provided at the end of this letter.

WHAT THIS STUDY IS ABOUT?

This study aims to provide a clearer insight on the challenges activist researchers face in their work as academics. By doing ethnographic research, this study hopes to dive deeper into lived experiences from academics who have combined their work as scholars together with activism. In total the researcher expects approximately 5 participants to take part in this study.

WHAT DOES PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

Participation in this study involves one meeting between you and the researcher in which the researcher will provide you with a set of questions. The researcher, however, will not be asking the questions and follow up on them. Rather she will simply provide the question and give you free space to tell as much or as little on this specific topic. This style of interviewing is used to provide as much free space for the participants to tell their stories as well as trying to keep the researcher's bias out of the interviews as much as possible. This meeting will take between thirty minutes to one hour. The interviews are preferably in person, but online meetings are also possible.

DO YOU HAVE TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. At any point during the study you have the option to withdraw from participation. If you are uncomfortable or not willing to answer certain questions, you can choose not to answer without there being any consequences nor are you obligated to provide the researcher with an explanation for not answering. Even after having completed an interview, you have the possibility to still withdraw your participation.



ARE THERE ANY RISKS IN PARTICIPATING?

Your participation will be completely anonymised. Any information that could potentially be traced back to any participant will be 100% anonymised unless priorly discussed and agreed upon by both the researcher and the participant.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS IN PARTICIPATING?

There are no direct benefits to any participant. However, this research may contribute to further knowledge on activism within academia and the challenges activist researchers face.

HOW WILL INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE BE RECORDED, STORED AND PROTECTED?

The data will be voice recorded. Data will be stored both locally on hard drives as well as potentially on an online drive which only the researcher has access to. None of the documents or recordings that will be stored will have the mentioning of any names. In case of a data leakage, this will ensure that the anonymity of the participant is protected as much as possible. The data will be disposed of five years after the research has been completed, so this would be 05-06-2028.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

The results of the study will be presented in a Bachelor Dissertation at Campus Fryslân, University of Groningen in the form of a presentation and ethnographic paper. The results may be published online or shared with third parties.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research study has obtained ethical approval from the Campus Fryslân Ethics Committee. Therefore, the researcher will uphold herself to the relevant ethical standards as per the standards of the University of Groningen.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Please sign the consent form as a sign of your intention to participate in this study. Even with signing the informed consent form you will still be able to withdraw your participation at any time.

WHO SHOULD YOU CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND OR COMPLAINTS?

Please contact the researcher, Evy de Joode, for any possible questions/concerns/feedback via email:

e.a.j.de.joode@student.rug.nl

The researcher appreciates all your feedback. If you have any complaints about the conducted study and or researcher that you do not wish to discuss with the researcher herself, please contact the main supervisor Dr. Emlen via email:

n.q.emlen@rug.nl



Appendix 3 Informed consent form as the template provided by the Campus Fryslân Ethics Committee

Title study: Activism and academia, a double edged sword; challenges faced by activist researchers

Name participant:

Assessment

- I have read the information sheet and was able to ask any additional question to the researcher.
- I understand I may ask questions about the study at any time.
- I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.
- I understand that at any time I can refuse to answer any question without any consequences.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

Confidentiality and Data Use

- I understand that none of my individual information will be disclosed to anyone but the researcher and my name will not be published.
- I understand that the information provided will be used only for this research and publications directly related to this research project.
- I understand that data (consent forms, recordings, interview transcripts) will be retained on a personal drive of the researcher for 5 years.

Future involvement

- I wish to receive a copy of the scientific output of the project.
- I consent to be re-contacted for participating in future studies.

**Having read and understood all the above, I agree to participate in the research study:
yes / no**

Date

Signature



To be filled in by the researcher

- I declare that I have thoroughly informed the research participant about the research study and answered any remaining questions to the best of my knowledge.
- I agree that this person participates in the research study.

Date

Signature

