



Tytti Steel & Jenni Rinne

Affective Patterns Related to Unemployment Experiences of Jobseekers Aged 50+ in South-Eastern Finland

Abstract

This study explores the affects and emotions linked to unemployment. It is based on 30 interviews of jobseekers aged 50+ in South-eastern Finland. The area in which the jobseekers live has had relatively high unemployment rates and the study participants have also experienced age discrimination, which makes their situation especially difficult. The article analyses the affective experiences of being unemployed and looking for a job.

Firstly, we found that the affective pattern of losing one's job consisted of a sense of shock and shame influenced by the societal image of the unemployed. Secondly, we found that applying for jobs and not being successful was a highly shameful and humiliating experience. This can be interpreted as an affective pattern arising from not living up to the social ideal of a successful person being someone with a job, and simultaneously constantly experiencing rejection by employers. Further, we found that the interviewees felt powerless when dealing with TE services (employment services), as these have become increasingly digitalised and depersonalised, and are perceived as conducting some age discrimination practices.

Keywords: affect, ageism, emotions, jobseeking, unemployment

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Introduction

The aim of the study is to deepen the understanding of the affective experiences of being unemployed. European Ethnology and its neighbouring disciplines have examined unemployment mostly through oral history and written reminiscence (e.g. Andersson 2003; Bohman 2017; Taira 2006; Terkel 1986). This article taps into the affective and the emotional through present-day interviews of unemployed jobseekers. Unemployment will be an evitable part of everyday life in the future (e.g. Ford 2015) because of outsourcing and structural changes in labour markets as well as changes in job descriptions due to technology. However, this will happen unevenly, and some professions and sectors will be affected more than others (Pyöriä 2017, 8). It is thus important to research what it is like emotionally to live as an unemployed person, the role of the affective aspect of this experience (see also Newman 1988), and how this experience ties into the cultural understandings of work. Paid work has multiple meanings for Finnish people, but its main aspects are that work is a source of identity as well as income, and that it also provides opportunities for social interaction (Haavisto 2010, 34–35).

Our ethnological approach focuses on the personal accounts of jobseekers aged 50+, who seem to struggle the most with the changes in work life and the experience of being made redundant (Järvensivu 2010, 270). These personal accounts were produced during peer-group activities initiated by the research project. The often emotionally described experiences will hopefully enrich the picture of unemployment offered by sociological and psychological studies which have largely been survey-based (Starrin & Jönsson 2007). The ethnological take further understands the emotions and affective experiences related to cultural meaning-making, values and ideals, as well as to societal processes and sees them as more than a reflection of an individual's psychological state. Our research questions are: What kind of affective experiences are related to unemployment and jobseeking in the case of older jobseekers? What do affective experiences do and how are they tied to cultural meanings of unemployment? In order to study this, we analysed the affective experiences of being unemployed. In line with Margaret Wetherell, we understand affective experience as a pattern formed from multiple, changing elements such as the discourses and narratives circulating in society.

This study takes place in Kotka (a middle-size Finnish town on the south coast, 140 km east of Helsinki), where the unemployment rate is noticeably higher than in the Metropolitan region. The town of Kotka describes itself as a port town and a town of the sea. It was established in the 1870s in a natural harbour at the mouth of the Kymi river. Timber was transported along the river by inland logging and from sawmills, and pulp and paper mills were es-

established there. The emerging industrial landscape was further reinforced by shipyards and engineering. The number of industry jobs peaked in the 1970s but since then, the emphasis of employment has moved to the provision of services (Saarinen 2002, 236). In recent years, the outsourcing of industries, digitalisation, and the global recession has hit the Kotka region hard. At the start of our research project in November 2016, the unemployment rate was 19.3 per cent (compared to 12.5 per cent in the whole country). Unemployment was higher among the older generations and started rising from the age of 45 (Kaakkois-Suomen ELY-keskus 2016; Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö 2016).

This study is based on 30 interviews conducted after two consecutive series of meetings open to all jobseekers aged 50+ in the Kotka area. In order to facilitate the meetings in an inspiring environment, the workshops were held in the Vellamo Maritime Centre. This probably encouraged the participation of jobseekers who had positive attitudes towards the establishment. (For more on the participatory aspect of the research, see Steel & Koskinen-Koivisto 2019.) Nevertheless, the interviewees were a heterogeneous group, with a wide age range. Eight interviewees were aged between 50 and 54. The biggest group was the 55–59-year-olds (15 interviewees). The oldest interviewee was 62 years old and the 60+ group had seven interviewees. About two-thirds of the interviewees were women (19) and one-third were men (11). Many of the interviewees had had long work careers. Their periods of unemployment ranged from a few months to several years. All except two interviewees had Finnish background.

The interviewees evenly represented several educational backgrounds. Eight interviewees had a vocational degree, nine had polytechnic-level schooling, three had a degree from a university of applied sciences, and ten interviewees had a master's degree. Many interviewees had diverse work experience and several qualifications and occupations. Many had worked for the same employer for a long time and had been made redundant for 'production and economic' reasons when the company they worked for had merged with another. Moving production to cheaper countries and digitalisation were also reasons for the redundancies. In a few cases, the interviewees had resigned because their workload had become impossible to cope with due to the downsizing of staff. The interviewees had worked in administration, commerce, construction, education, engineering, industry and logistics. In this article, we refer to the interviewees with pseudonyms of common Finnish names of this age group.

Studying affect and emotions of unemployment from an ethnological perspective

In this study we see no significant difference between affect and emotion (e.g. Rinne 2016, 35–39). Like other researchers (e.g. Wetherell 2012), we too take

a critical stance towards affect being seen as something pre-conscious, and feelings and emotions as cognitive representations of affects – a theory stemming from philosopher Brian Massumi (1995). Like Anderson (2009), we see affect as something ill-defined that exceeds clear figuration. This does not necessarily or automatically mean pre-conscious; it can also be something in-between, in the making, or a mixture. Thus, in this paper we do not understand affect and emotions as separate categories of experience, even though we recognise the usefulness of their analytical separation in some cases. Some psychological studies on emotions and unemployment have been based on neat emotion categories whereas others have categorised emotions as positive or negative (von Scheve et al. 2016). For an ethnologist, the main task is not to give exact definitions of affects or emotions, but to ask what affects and emotions do and how they are related to society, i.e. to explore how affects or emotions are linked to culture and how are they lived in everyday life (Ahmed 2004; Frykman 2012, 35).

In line with Margaret Wetherell (2012), we understand affect as a pattern. She defines affect not as an innate state of a human being, but as connected to social life. She understands affect as consisting of different elements such as ‘somatic, discursive, situated, historical, social, psychological and cultural’ (Wetherell 2012, 4). This allows us to connect affective experiences to culture and society: to their circulating discourses, narratives and understanding. However, an affective pattern is not something unchanging and closed. In fact, it is impossible to grasp the whole scope of an affective pattern (Wetherell 2012, 96). According to Wetherell, some affective patterns vary in their durability. Sometimes they arise and fade away quite quickly but sometimes they become more habitual or even practices that are maintained by repetition (Wetherell 2012, 23, 104). Here we look at the more habitual patterns of affect that still have the potential to change.

This article understands affective experiences of unemployment as being connected to the overall processes taking place in society that influence the conditions of everyday life. Although in the Finnish context, full-time wage-work is still the most predominate form of employment, working life is going through structural changes that cause unemployment in certain sectors. Even though current statistics show that more precarious employment has not increased, employment options vary greatly in different regions and occupations. (Pyöriä 2017, 8.) Current changes that cause unemployment are digitalization, artificial intelligence and robotics, which make some professions unnecessary; others are the tightening competition of jobs in the global labour market. People working in branches of heavy industry in particular are influenced by trade cycles and economic trends are in a vulnerable position. (Pyöriä 2017, 9.) These are the main reasons why people in this study have faced unemployment.

The above-mentioned structural changes in the labour market cause dis-possession in particular occupations and sectors of working life, which in turn leads to a weakened sense of social security and well-being and affects the emotional lives of individuals. According to Laurent Berlant, people in the USA, for example, have become attached to the belief that they are able to attain a 'good life' through wage work, which means permanent housing, job security, education for their children and political as well social equality. However, as Berlant has pointed out, it has become evident that current working life is unable to provide opportunities to make lives better for everyone. According to Berlant, this situation is perceived affectively in people's everyday lives. (Berlant 2011, 3.) This relationship between the affective lives of people and the economic and social reality that have an impact on people's everyday lives and well-being is also recognised in the Finnish context. Labour market changes have an impact on people's meaning of life as well as on their hopes and dreams for the future, which is evident in people's emotional lives. (Jokinen, Venäläinen & Vähämäki 2015, 12; see also Järvensivu 2010).

As this study is part of an applied research project, the emphasis in the interviews and group meetings was on practical issues: the aim was to determine how it feels to be a jobseeker aged 50+ in South-eastern Finland and how the difficulties of finding paid labour could be overcome. One assumption from the beginning was that affects and emotions have a significant and more complex role in the everyday life of a jobseeker than they are usually given credit for, at least by governmental employment services (TE services).¹ Based on accounts in the media and previous research in the same project (Steel & Jyrkinen 2017), we knew that some jobseekers' experience the overwhelmingly digital services offered by TE services as arduous and insensitive. Looking at the situation from the perspective of the unemployed, the scarcity of face-to-face services can be interpreted as a signal by society (or the government) of disinterest in unemployed people and their employment. For the unemployed, a lack of support can become not just a practical problem but also a hurdle at the affective level, an alienating and demotivating feature. We wanted to know more about this experience.

Because affects or emotions were not the focus of the fieldwork the picture of the affective experiences presented in this study shows only part of the immense variety and diversity of the phenomenon. According to Norman Denzin (1984, 9), the interpretation of emotions is always unfinished, provisional and incomplete. In addition, the research frame had an impact on the research mate-

1 More information on unemployment allowances in Finland on The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health website: <https://stm.fi/en/income-security/unemployment>; more on TE services: http://www.te-palvelut.fi/te/en/jobseekers/if_unemployed/rights_obligations/index.html

rial: before the interviews, which are the main source of this article, 29 of the 30 interviewees participated in a series of meetings in which they discussed unemployment, ageism and applying for jobs. This process attracted and encouraged jobseekers who were active and were able to attend the meetings, which were held on set days. Since group discussion was one of the more dominant ways of working in the meetings, the project most likely attracted people who thought group discussions might be useful. From a methodological point of view, focusing on practicalities rather than on affective experiences can be an asset in the sense that the affective and emotional issues that arose in the interviews were likely to have been of high importance to the interviewees as they came up in the discussion without prompting. Sometimes the affects and emotions were consciously described by the interviewees. At other times, they were noticeable in the interviews as changes in tone of voice, laughs or sighs (see Denzin 1984, 6–9). The interviewers were a woman in her 40s with links to the region in which the study was conducted (one author of this paper) and a research assistant, a woman in her 30s. The interviews were professionally transcribed, and the transcriber marked laughter and deviations in speech. In the citations, the observations are in double brackets, and explanations and interpretations by the authors in square brackets.

The analysis of the sources was an abductive process, consisting of the oscillation of more practice-oriented and theoretically-oriented readings. The analysis began by Author 1 (Steel) reading through the interviews and identifying the parts that concerned affects and emotions. At this stage, the author was trying to remain open to any interpretation on the affective level as it was not a dominant topic in the questions of the semi-structured interviews. In the second stage, Author 1 identified recurring and central themes which are not all discussed in this paper. For instance, the affective experiences linked to the participatory activities that proceeded the interviews will be explored in other texts. In the third stage of the analysis, Author 2 (Rinne) joined in the process and the final readings of the material were more theoretically guided.

Next, we present the findings of this study. In the first two empirical sections we examine the affective experiences of what it is like to be unemployed. After this we move on to the affective experience of looking for a job, including experiences of communicating with TE services and experiences of peer support.

The affective experience of becoming unemployed

Losing one's job hurts (Brand 2015). Becoming unemployed increases insecurity in one's life through loss of income and the social aspects of belonging to a work community (e.g. Kortteinen & Tuomikoski 1998; Newman 1988; Taira 2006). Becoming unemployed means more sadness and anxiety, higher levels of depressive symptoms and less happiness (Brand 2015; von Scheve et

al. 2017). Furthermore, a great deal of research has examined how unemployment may create social and health problems (see e.g. Airio & Niemelä 2013; Starrin & Jönsson 2007) in addition to negative feelings and social exclusion. Recently, working life researchers have questioned the understanding of formal employment and its connection to sense of belonging. For example, basic income or voluntary work could create the opportunity to form other kinds of social belonging (e.g. Chamberlain 2018).

However, the importance of wage work for one's identity remains rather central, especially among the more aged population, as this study also partly shows (see also Steel & Tuori 2019). Previous psychological research has argued that losing one's job can be compared to losing a close family member and can even have more prolonged negative effects than divorce or widowhood (von Scheve et al. 2017). At the same time, a long-standing view sees the unemployed as lazy and ignorant (e.g. Marsden 1975), creating a particular societal position on which the negative impacts might be difficult to understand before one actually becomes unemployed.

Emotions such as worthlessness, desperation, frustration and social isolation are often linked to unemployment (Kalb 2016; Lassus et al. 2015; van Spanje 2014, 18; von Scheve et al. 2016). Therefore, it was not surprising that several interviewees mentioned feeling low-spirited or depressed after becoming unemployed. An engineer, whose pseudonym here is Juhani Laine, had worked in a managerial position for many years, and talked about his experiences after being made redundant twice. The first time he was let go was after a long career in a company, but the second time was after a shorter management position which ended because of the company's financial difficulties.

Juhani Laine: The second time I was let go I got more support, but the first time, after a career of 20 years, I was in a place from which I could not get up. I did not even understand what had happened in this world. And even the second time it was difficult. So, when the streamlining of the company affects you personally, they give you a pile of papers, but you can't even manage to read anything because you are trying to understand how the world is changing.²

By saying he did not understand his situation 'in this world', Juhani implied that it was difficult for him to understand and accept that he was now unemployed. Later in the interview he described his first reactions to the dismissal as 'having lost the ball', i.e. feeling perplexed. It could be argued that for him and many others, the affective experience revolved around the shock of be-

² All interviews were conducted in Finnish and the quotations have been translated into English by Tytti Steel.

ing given notice after a long career. Juhani Laine did not discuss his situation in more detail but according to previous research, economic distress, feelings of guilt (attribution of job loss to one's own shortcomings) and the stigma of being unemployed are the basis of the emotional turmoil (Leana & Feldman 1992; Miller & Hoppe 1994) that Juhani Laine describes here. Applying Margaret Wetherell's idea of affect as a pattern, we can argue that here the affect consists of shock and several negative feelings which are tied to the change in status from an employed to an unemployed person. The older generation, which Juhani belongs to, has thought of paid employment as a way for an individual to contribute to society and its well-being. Through work, one claims a valued position in society. (Järvensivu 2010, 46). Thus, losing one's job means losing a particular position in society, and this can be difficult to endure.

At the same time, it should be noted that the way in which people react to job loss varies considerably (Andersson 2003; Taira 2006; van Spanje 2014, 38; Wanberg 2012). Sometimes, being given notice can be a relief. This applies to cases in which work has been arduous and has led to burnout or a similar experience. The source material used for this study contained a few such cases. In addition to relief, these interviewees felt exhausted due to working extremely hard for a long period. However, in the long run, the interviewees who experienced the ending of a stressful job as a relief still eventually felt bad about being unemployed. This was due to the cumulation of financial stress in combination with other negative aspects that influenced their hopes of finding a new job such as age discrimination (e.g. Macnicol 2006), high regional unemployment figures and changes in industry.

For years, Anneli Virtanen (pseudonym), who lived alone, had concentrated on her job so intensively that almost all her social life consisted of work. When she was suddenly made redundant it was a big shock to her. The way in which Virtanen was dismissed was emotionally especially difficult. Her notice came as a huge, unpleasant surprise, contrary to her superior's and her own thoughts. After she was given notice by a senior manager she had to leave work immediately and was not allowed to check her email or do anything other than gather her personal belongings.

After having been given notice, she said that she felt alone and low-spirited. Fortunately, her pets made her feel better and were the reason to get up in the morning. In addition to the shock and disappointment, she had to find new ways of belonging and spending meaningful time in her everyday life to replace the constantly-worked overtime and the thoughts of customers' contentment with her work. Previous research has proposed that people who are let go in a group, for instance when all a company's operations are outsourced, feel less distressed than people who are given notice individually. The latter are more prone to blam-

ing their own shortcomings (Brand 2015; Miller & Hoppe 1994). In addition, the generation to which Virtanen belongs generally views the relationship between employers and employees as loyal and sees their right to long-term employment with the same employer as given as long as work is done well (Järvensivu 2010, 276). The story of Anneli Virtanen is an example of how a single dismissal has the potential to leave the redundant person in a very difficult position.

Virtanen, who was in her early 50s, worked in logistics, a typical trade in the Kotka region with Finland's biggest export harbour. Despite her experience and dedication to her work, it became clear that it would be difficult to find a new post in the downward-trending economy. In addition, she felt alone and that she had no one to talk to about her difficulties. She felt her closest family members were not supportive and over time, she noticed no professional help was provided.

Our focus in the cases of Virtanen and Laine is on interpreting what being outside society means. For Virtanen this meant a sense of loneliness, as her social relation was tied to the workplace. For Laine, it was more a sense of shame about losing his job that, in his mind, placed him outside respectable society in the sense that he felt he was incapable of attending to his affairs (see also Silta-la 1994). The affective experiences of losing one's job are thus not only tied to a single event or thing; they are tied to a more complex set of social relations and hierarchies. Unemployment suddenly becoming a reality in the life of a person from a particular age group who has not thought about what it means to be unemployed, in a society that values formal employment, can certainly be a shock and feel humiliating, which is hard to deal with when also losing the social support of a work community. According to Wetherell's idea of affect as a pattern (2012) consisting of different elements, this would mean that Virtanen's and Laine's cases, the shock of losing their job was tied to the societal and cultural notion of the unemployed and the importance of paid work for social inclusion (e.g. Järvensivu 2010). Even though being let go from a stressful job might even feel a relief, the interview material shows that it still has the potential to lead to a sense of exclusion and loneliness. Thus, the affective pattern can be understood as a combination of a sense of shock, loneliness and shame, which are all linked to ideas about work circling in society and changed social status.

Affective positioning: negotiating the affective experience of being unemployed

One of the emotions in the interviews was embitterment, especially in connection to a dismissal that had felt unjust. In addition, Juhani Laine said he was 'genuinely bitter' because he had to spend his pension savings before retiring. He experienced his age as the biggest obstacle to finding employment – this was different from some other interviewees who believed they needed to update their skills or acquire completely new qualifications. Our interpre-

tation is that the strong experience of ageism – since he felt he had adequate skills and experience – at least to some extent increased Laine’s bitter feelings.

In the individual interviews, some people pointed out that bitter feelings had been expressed in the group meetings. These people said they did not want to become embittered themselves. As Marjatta Järvinen put it, it makes others feel bad when people talk in a bitter way and use negative language:

That purification [letting off steam by talking angrily or negatively] needs to be done, but it’s not good in the long run. One has to be professional there and be able to turn it into something positive.

Talking about negative feelings, Kristiina Heikkinen pointed out in her interview that she felt puzzled when one participant in the group meeting was still very upset even though they had lost their job about 10 years ago. She thought that if after so many years it still made the person cry, something else must have been making them sad. She considered herself as less work-oriented than most people and for her, this seemed like an old experience that should have lost its meaning by now. This illustrates the diversity of the personalities and situations among the unemployed. Heikkinen said she could nevertheless understand the bitterness caused by the unjust dismissal and the negative emotions caused by letting older workers go first during downsizing.

Bitter feelings were obviously a central part of the affective experience of being unemployed for some of the participants, whereas others said they hoped to avoid bitterness or treat it as a passing emotion. Expressions of bitterness seemed to function as a ventilation of one’s experiences. According to Wetherell, affects can sometimes be understood as intentional positioning acts. She claims that narrating and giving accounts of an affective experience is about situated affective practice. This affective situating practice builds social orders and subjectivities (Wetherell 2012, 90.). Thus, bitterness or similarly lack of bitterness can be understood in this paper as a more habitual affective pattern that placed the interviewees in a particular position. Bitterness was connected to the feeling of unjust treatment or ageism, losing one’s savings or unfair dismissal. Furthermore, non-bitterness was connected to setting oneself outside of unwanted bitterness that they perceived to imbue other unemployed. This positioning reflects and maintains hierarchies and power relations between the unemployed and the rest of the society. It seems that the interviewees were sometimes trying to position themselves as untouched by these hierarchies and sometimes as being an unfairly treated victim. Through this utterance of embitterment or non-bitterness, the meaning of one’s expe-

rience can be constructed in connection to power relations while negotiating one's identity and position as unemployed.

Another example of affective positioning is the way in which the interviewees did not like to be defined as only unemployed. For example, an interviewee here called Tuula Nieminen said she did not like to use the word unemployed (as a noun) because she felt it placed her in a specific position. Nieminen and the interviewer were discussing a recent TV discussion in which the current Minister of Labour had said that the long-term unemployed also have other problems. Nieminen elaborated:

Yes, that's it. That builds the stereotype of a person who, on the day they get their unemployment benefit, goes to Alko [state liquor store] and drinks and abuses their medication and is an all-over so-called lost cause. But then ((sigh)) in our group one woman put it so well: 'I am other things too, not just an unemployed person'. And that is one thing - I kind of feel lucky that I'm so old already - that I see myself as so much more than just a person who does not have a job at the moment.

Along with several other interviewees, Anneli Virtanen said that she felt that the unemployed are made to feel guilty and that they should be allowed to retain their human dignity. She felt that TE services thought unemployment was one's own fault, even though she knew this was not true. This may be influenced by the current rhetoric of total individual responsibility for one's own work situation (Ojala 2016; Weeks 2011, 8; see also Kortteinen & Tuomikoski 1998; Taira 2006). We add that this notion of individual responsibility affects the emotional lives of the unemployed and changes their sense of self and identity because having a job is a sign of success in life in general. Guilt and reduced self-dignity seemed to follow the status of unemployment in the minds of the interviewees as well as in the view of society. The lowered societal position caused by attitudes towards unemployment also creates insecurity and shame (e.g. Newman 1988; Starrin & Jönsson 2007) and in a broad sense, being unemployed changes a person's subjectivity. The way that a person perceives themselves in relation to society is affected by how society perceives the unemployed. A man in his early 50s with years of work experience in the building industry said he would like to see employers and society rethink the negative image attached to long-term unemployment. He said he never imagined that he himself might be unemployed for more than a year.

As an exception, Marjatta Järvinen did not feel as if unemployed people were unworthy or lacked dignity and told the interviewer that maybe she was silly to think so. Instead, she pointed out that she looked at working life in a cynical way because increasing efficiency at work in general has made work

more stressful. However, she said she still felt anxiety over having to live on unemployment benefits but that her unpaid voluntary work justified the benefits she received. Several interviewees did voluntary work, but Järvinen was the only one who explicitly said she did it because she felt obliged due to her unemployment benefits. Whatever the reason for voluntary work and comparable activities, time structure, social interaction and the feeling of being useful and contributing to the well-being of others helps the unemployed (see e.g. Newman 1988). Marjatta Järvinen is an example of how some unemployed people shift towards values other than succeeding at work and having a high income and a successful career (Kortteinen & Tuomikoski 1998; Taira 2001, 6). Some scholars have argued that as a society we should start looking at other activities such as household and voluntary work as meaningful work that also creates social inclusion (Chamberlain 2018; Weeks: 2011). Järvinen's take on her situation could be interpreted as feeling that her voluntary work is the equivalent of wage work, but the compensation of her work comes from society rather than an employer, which in turn gave her self-dignity.

Like Anneli Virtanen, Kristiina Heikkinen also said she felt strongly that unemployed people are made to feel guilty and that she felt as if wage work was the main reason for a person's existence. She used a passive form when talking about this issue: 'The message is repeatedly that you are a bad person if you don't have a job. It's said that you should become an entrepreneur. It's the least you can do even if you don't make a living out of it.'

Many arenas of societal life have a negative view of the unemployed (e.g. Hobbins 2016; Hänninen 2014; Oivo & Kerätär 2018; Ojala 2016). In a Swedish survey-based study, 75 per cent of participants (who were unemployed) reported hearing others make disparaging comments about the unemployed (Starrin & Jönsson 2007). One example of recent negative attitudes can be found in discussions on the 'activity model', a cut in unemployment benefit if a jobseeker fails to meet certain requirements, e.g. minimum income from occasional work or taking part in courses organised by TE services. The first data on the consequences of this change in legislation shows that almost half of the people (about 80 000 individuals) who receive unemployment benefits via The Social Insurance Institution of Finland have been unable to meet these requirements and their unemployment benefits have been cut (Sosiaalija terveysministeriö 2018). The Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (2018) claim that of their members, only 13 per cent of the older unemployed have managed to meet the requirements of the new law.

Anneli Virtanen said she could think of 20 acquaintances in Kotka who were also unemployed, and this made her feel she was not alone and that her unemployment was not her fault. She explained that she valued other things

in her life more highly than work because she had experienced deep grief through losing or almost losing people close to her when she was younger. She said she felt guilty because she did not take the pressure to be employed so seriously and was happy to fill her life with meaningful things to do, such as unpaid voluntary teaching. She had no immediate economic concerns, as her husband had a permanent job in Kotka. She also wanted to be near her elderly parents and thus did not want to move elsewhere.

The feeling of guilt is also tied to not being willing to move to a region that has more job opportunities. Several interviewees said they had worked away from their respective families and felt it was too hard, both physically and mentally. Only two interviewees felt positive about an itinerant occupation and for both of these, this was a major aspect of their identity work in the interview situation (Steel & Tuori 2019). Many mentioned elderly parents who needed constant care. In addition, a few interviewees looked after their adult children who needed more time and attention from their parents, due health problems.

Many of the interviewees seemed to struggle with a sense of guilt and shame at being unemployed, even for having and enjoying other dimensions of life. Many said, however, that on a rational level they knew it was not their fault, it was clear that on an affective level they felt these emotions. These negative feelings form an affective pattern (Wetherell 2012), fed by the societal image of the unemployed based on the cultural stereotypes that circle in political discussion of active versus lazy unemployed people (e.g. Ojala 2016). This also connects to the central value of paid work as providing a respectable position in society, still strong among the population aged 50+. Nieminen pointed out that the long-term employed in particular are viewed not only as having failed for not having a job but also as having failed in their lives in other ways. Virtanen refers to a repeated message from the outside that a lack of a job makes a person bad. This image of the unemployed is connected to the individual responsibility for one's own employment already noted: if one is not successful in this matter it can lead to a sense of personal failure and to negative feelings about oneself such as those described. Another issue that caused guilt was unwillingness to leave family ties for a job. Thus, the affective pattern here is a combination of negative feelings such as guilt and societal discourses on unemployed people and their responsibilities.

However, we should not view Wetherell's affective patterns as over deterministic; they also vary (Wetherell 2012, 116-117). What brings variety to the patterns here is that people discover ways to find value and self-dignity in order to cope with the negative experience of self, caused by unemployment. One way is to do voluntary work. Another way is to look at one's values and shift their emphasis to, for instance, family ties and health, which gives people's personal lives meaning (see also Taira 2006; Steel & Tuori, 2019).

Affectivity of not succeeding in jobseeking

Previous research has noted that the everyday life of an active jobseeker is highly stressful (Leeman, Isola, Kukkonen, Puromäki, Valtari & Keto-Tokoi 2018), which was also a widely shared experience among the interviewees. Several interviewees also felt that finding employment in Kotka was hopeless, which increased the stress of jobseeking. Tuula Nieminen pointed out the emotional contradiction of searching for a new job. She felt that she had repeatedly invested a great deal of energy and put her heart into the application process. The result had so far always been disappointment, and this made her anxious. When she had periods of not applying for a job, she felt less anxious because she had no expectations. Nieminen felt financially secure in her personal life as her husband worked and could support them both. Nevertheless, she described a strong feeling of desertion the moment she found out that yet another application had been unsuccessful: 'It's like standing in a line at the dance pavilion and not being asked to dance by anyone while the people standing next to you get asked.' Nieminen draws an analogy between the sense of exclusion, shame and humiliation of not succeeding in applying for a job to the affective experience of being left as a wallflower. The dance pavilion is a cultural, emotional and affective symbol of a place in which many Finns have found their spouses and life companions (e.g. Saarikoski 2014). Being left as a wallflower is seen as a kind of public humiliation, potentially a deeply bruising experience, especially if it is repeated.

Previous research has shown that this experience of humiliation and shame can be identified as a central part of the affective experiences of jobseeking (Starrin & Jönsson 2007). Shame can also be viewed as a mark of one's own failure; a sign of not living up to the social ideal and not following up the normative existence (Ahmed 2004, 106–107). As discussed earlier, the interviewees had a sense of individual responsibility over their own employment, enhanced by public opinion which also views unsuccessful jobseekers as failures. Thus, the sense of shame and humiliation here seems to come from a sense of failure of not living up to the expectations of both oneself and society.

From the point of view of what affects and emotions can do, it is important to note that shame can have a discouraging and even paralyzing effect on an individual (Rechart & Ikonen 1994). The more shaming experiences and the greater financial hardship that a jobseeker has experienced, the more they are affected by depression, nervousness and deterioration in health (Starrin & Jönsson 2007). In addition, shame has been defined as a broad term and includes feelings ranging from social discomfort and embarrassment to humiliation (Retzinger 1991). Feelings of discomfort and embarrassment arose in the project meetings and the interviews in connection with the challenge of

talking about one's own skills and strengths. Several interviewees mentioned it felt difficult, awkward, and even shameful to be 'boasting' about oneself.

However, Nieminen made it clear that she and many other participants did not feel ashamed about discussing their situation or their strengths and weaknesses with the other jobseekers in the group meetings organised by the research project. This could mean that jobseeking activities in a peer group could be beneficial to some. This is also important when considering the influence of power relations in jobseeking activities offered by TE services. How those power relations affect a jobseeker's emotions and their ability to function is even more important.

Some of the interviewees used sarcastic humour to lighten the depressing situation they found themselves in. For example, Tuula Nieminen was asked if she had anything to add to what she had already said about TE services and she answered: 'No, I don't think I have anything to add. I'm just happy that society still hasn't posted me a cyanide capsule with an offer for a free funeral next week if I take the cyanide now'. Despite the humorous statement, the issue of suicide among unemployed people is a serious one. A recent study discovered a link between the rising levels of unemployment and suicide worldwide (Nordt et al. 2015). The idea that one is only valuable to society through paid labour seemed to be common among the interviewees, which is also in line with research on the value of paid work in Finnish society (e.g. Järvensivu 2010). In a previous job (in a different part of Finland), one of the interviewees had experienced three of his former colleagues committing suicide soon after they had been made redundant. He said it was a tough time. According to him, fishing, hunting and experiencing nature with his dogs were therapeutic to him in the sense that they helped him cope with the loss of his job. These activities can be seen as either active self-care in the process of recovering from job-loss and sorrow, or passivity in the job market (see e.g. Frykman & Hansen 2009). The sarcasm and looking for value in one's life outside of formal employment were coping strategies in this difficult situation.

In the interviews, the sense of humiliation and shame were the most prevalent emotions in the affective experience of not being successful in finding a job. A combination of these emotions can be interpreted as an affective pattern (Wetherell 2012). It includes a sense of personal failure in one's responsibility for one's own employment in a difficult situation of a poor job market and age discrimination.

Affective experiences of employment services and benefits of peer support

It is essential to note that in relation to looking for a job, all the interviewees had negative experiences of TE services. These experiences were based on dis-

appointments. The interviewees had felt neglected by TE officials when, for instance, a scheduled phone call was not made when the jobseeker had made a special effort to be available on the day when the call was expected. They thought they had sometimes received conflicting or false instructions from the officials and even absurd episodes had occurred, such as when in reply to an email to his designated TE official, an interviewee received an automated message: 'You are not entitled to send email to this address'.

In some cases, the negative affective experiences were either directly or indirectly linked to the age of the interviewees. In a few but nevertheless alarming cases, TE services had clearly carried out practices that implied age discrimination. For instance, a 59-year-old interviewee had been invited to an event marketing a course that interested them but was told there was an upper age limit of 58 for the course. Some interviewees felt that the TE officials allocated scarce resources to younger jobseekers. In addition to ageism, the fact that many interviewees had long working careers and no recent experience of jobseeking also made their situation difficult when there were no services to help them (e.g. courses on how to apply for jobs today).

Some of the interviewees needed more frequent contact with TE services in order to obtain help in jobseeking, as well as to become acquainted with all the practicalities that they should know. Some, like Tuula Nieminen, had negative feelings about the new process of TE services' interviews every three months. Her interpretation was that TE services were controlling the unemployed, not trying to help them: 'In a way, their starting point is always the idea that we just don't want to work.' This feeling was in stark contrast with the fact that the interviewees were eager to work and many said any work would do.

Whereas the 'faceless' TE services were experienced as negative, everyone regarded the peer support offered by the other participants in the meetings as positive. Tuula Nieminen pondered on and verbalised her emotional and affective thoughts in more detail:

Tuula Nieminen: It was like [an insight] that there really are these other people who are in the same situation. So, in a way it was comforting that these experiences are surprisingly similar, surprisingly similar. I suppose it's something like meeting fellow sufferers – it somehow alleviates the anxiety.

She thought that peer support could help her and others avoid a defeated mindset, and prevent thinking that they no longer have any value as unemployed people. Nieminen described how in the small group discussions, the participants showed empathy and caring towards each other:

Tuula Nieminen: What surprised me was how spontaneously people uttered fairly strong emotional expressions. Someone could sit there at the table, like, almost started crying and said they had been feeling terrible lately. So, the need to tell other people about their situation, that was what surprised me.

Some of the participants continued to meet after the research project meetings ended and Nieminen noted how the people in the group encouraged each other.

This friendly, understanding, solicitous and encouraging response was in sharp contrast to how the participants experienced TE services and the potential employers who gave them no feedback when they applied for jobs. Some interviewees also had good experiences, especially in face-to-face situations, but most experienced TE services as distant and abrupt. As Nieminen said, for the interviewees, TE services offered mere digital reporting and was a control organisation. Many participants had found the digital 'services' difficult to use and unhelpful in finding a new job, which most probably contributed to the fact that TE services were not perceived positively. Several interviewees said the organisation was completely useless to them. Previous research has shown that the customer experience of the digital, governmentally financed services sometimes causes the feeling of powerlessness (Bodén 2016, 45). This can happen even though the aim is to save customers time and produce more flexible services that impact on people's lives and give them back power (Bodén 2016, 53). We argue that the most obvious affective pattern linked with TE services was that of a sense of powerlessness. This powerlessness was based on the lack of a customer orientation approach and experiences of ageism, the faceless nature of the services and the experience of being controlled rather than helped.

For some participants, continuing the meetings after the facilitated group meetings ended and keeping in touch through Facebook have been positive consequences of taking part in this research project. Even though the Facebook group has not been very active, some interviewees mentioned it seems to serve as a place for 'venting one's spleen'. Understanding and encouraging comments in social media can be one way of supporting each other. Social support improves an unemployed person's opportunity to stay healthy (Starrin & Jönsson 2007). Peer-support might provide support in more equal terms than when dealing with TE services.

We claim that the affective experience of losing a job and becoming unemployed is somewhat a shared experience of a combination of emotions which forms affective patterns. The components of these patterns were connected to how unemployed people are perceived by society as well as how the unemployed perceive their own position in society. The interviewees seemed to

share the common ideas to some extent even though at the same time they disagreed, now that they were experiencing the reality of what it meant to be unemployed. We would like to suggest that the unemployed form a kind of affective community (Hutchinson 2016) with collectively understood emotions. This community should not be understood as fixed in time. It has different variations depending on context as well as individual backgrounds. But here, for example, the community was formed on the basis of the emotions of a particular age group, in a particular place, through similar experiences of being unemployed and trying to find a job in a difficult labour market.

Brought together by the research project, this community acted as a peer support group based on shared affective experience. We suggest that this kind of affective peer support could ease some of the power relations the unemployed experience in their dealings with TE services. Further, on the affective level, peer support could provide a different type of support to that of TE services. TE services should have a better understanding of their contribution to the affective patterns that influence the capabilities of jobseekers. Despite needing improvement, official employment services will be greatly needed in the future, and peer support could make these services more effective.

Conclusions

In this paper we have identified and interpreted several affective patterns connected to the experience of becoming and then being unemployed in later life. We also identified affective patterns connected to the experience of looking for a job as jobseeker aged 50+. Firstly, we found that the affective pattern of losing one's job, in the case of these people with long working careers often with same employer, consisted of a sense of shock and shame influenced by the societal image of the unemployed. A sense of social exclusion was part of this pattern because of the importance of wage work for social inclusion. Furthermore, we found that the interviewees were negotiating their positions as unemployed in relation to hierarchies of society, through giving accounts of their affective experiences of being unemployed. For example, they presented themselves as bitter or non-bitter in relation to how they wanted to portray themselves. They also did not want to use the word unemployed because it had such a negative connotations, such as being a failure. We suggested that this affective positioning and negotiating one's position formed an affective pattern that included the common idea that an individual is responsible for their own situation makes them feel guilt and inferiority at not being able to live up to the ideal. Our interpretation is that the strong experience of failing to obtain support and help from officials at least to some extent increased the bitterness in the affective experience of some interviewees. This was linked

to the long working careers many of them had: we interpreted that they were expecting more in return for all their tax-paying years.

Secondly, we found that applying for jobs and not being successful was a highly shameful and humiliating experience. We argued that this sense of shame and humiliation can be interpreted as an affective pattern of not living up to the social ideal of a successful person as one who has a job and simultaneously constantly experiencing rejection by employers. Further we found that the interviewees felt powerless when dealing with TE services, which have been increasingly digitalised and depersonalised, and also seemed to conduct some age discrimination practices. Finally, we suggested that the interviewees formed a kind of affective community with somewhat shared experiences and understandings of the affective experience of being unemployed and trying to find a job in a particular situation at a particular age. This community seemed to offer a more equal venue with affective peer support that could ease the negative experience of jobseeking.

The interviews demonstrated how being unemployed is a shameful experience. Applying for work is a continuous affective strain and requires resilience in inevitable cases of shame and humiliation and sense of powerlessness. We suggest that a particular kind of emotional subject forms in relation to these affective experiences, which are inseparable from the social context with its changing job market and society (e.g. Berlant 2011).

The scarcity of services and support are a tangible hindrance to employment for jobseekers who are dealing with structural changes in the job market and have very little experience of looking for a job and navigating a new system with new realities and requirements. The introduction of a process of interviews every three months by TE services was seen by many jobseekers as wasted resources as the so-called interview was merely a phone call lasting a few minutes. Some participants in this study understood the phone calls as more of a control measure rather than support, which according to Sundvall and Mayer (2018), was the original idea of this increased contact. The interviewees had different experiences of TE services. Even though the criticism of the non-existent services was vast, several participants had positive views of face-to-face or telephone discussions. An encouraging attitude on the part of TE services could break the vicious cycle of lowered self-esteem and impending withdrawal from jobseeking. Based on our research, we would like to emphasize how important it is for TE services not to deny the existence of different forms of discrimination in recruiting. The organisation also needs to check that ageism or other forms of discrimination are not built in to the services they offer jobseekers. In addition to the better support of officials, we suggest that jobseekers might also benefit from a peer group's jobseeking

activities because they provide support on the basis of shared affective experiences, which TE services cannot offer. TE services have also identified this as an emerging trend (Sundvall & Mayer 2018).

According to Kortteinen and Tuomikoski (1998, 168–169), to survive unemployment as capable individuals, people need social support. This support is double-edged: communal (based on values) and social (based on money and compensation). If one of these forms of support fails, over time it leads to ‘illfare’ instead of welfare. Kortteinen and Tuomikoski claim that repeated experiences of shame and humiliation are central to this process. This ethnographic study further consolidates these observations. Both forms of support were of essence to the participants of this study. The support of family, friends and others in the everyday lives of the unemployed became visible, especially when affective support was missing. The role of societal support that Kortteinen and Tuomikoski present as mere financial help (unemployment benefits) also includes practical, affective and cognitive aspects in the form of social interaction with TE services and opportunities to acquire new skills, for example.

In line with Brand (2015), we suggest further research on the effects of unemployment on families and communities, as the affectivity of close social relationships are often central to the well-being of an individual. It would be important to recognise the role of family life in accordance with possible future employment and how the care responsibilities and future work life of the unemployed could be combined in a sustainable way.

The research frame of this study and the outline of this paper highlight many negative aspects of the affective patterns of the unemployed. The research frame encouraged critical views and placed importance on the experiences of ageism and other forms of inequality. As for the outline of this paper, the affective practices of becoming unemployed and the often negative attitudes towards the unemployed are in line with previous research. Future research should concentrate on finding opportunities for positive outcomes from the perspective of the unemployed individuals. In this study, affective strength supported by counselling and help from others, including TE services and peer support, were the point of positive outcomes in the difficult situation in which the jobseekers found themselves.

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A total of 30 interviews of unemployed jobseekers who took part in a participatory research project organised as part of the WeAll Project in the town of Kotka, Finland. The interviews are currently in the possession of the project researchers at the University of Helsinki. The interviews will eventually be added to the collections of the Finnish Social Science Data Archive.

The pseudonyms are common Finnish first names and family names.

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