

Examining experiences of the pandemic requires a more critical eye, says researcher

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The coronavirus pandemic was, in many ways, a unique period whose impacts are still being seen and felt today. The effects of the pandemic live on in people's memories, fears, hopes, and bodies.

Should society face another [pandemic](#) in the future, it will be vital to critically assess the debate and discussion surrounding the coronavirus, discover missing perspectives, and bring light to any shadows in our [collective memory](#).

Postdoctoral Researcher Tuomo Alhojärvi's new article focuses on the discussions concerning the lessons learned from the pandemic. The research is [published](#) in the journal *Diacritics*.

Society often addresses the coronavirus pandemic specifically through learning and teaching-oriented discourse, both during its acute phases and after the fact. These discussions place particular emphasis on the personal insights, technical achievements, and political agendas spurred on by the pandemic.

In addition to these lessons being widespread, Alhojärvi also posits that they are often predictable. Despite the commonly stated disruptiveness of the pandemic, the lessons learned often seem like mere bland simplifications.

However, Alhojärvi's focus is not on the veracity of any lessons, but on what kind of unspoken assumptions underlie our lesson-centric discourse.

"A common and shared period of time shouldn't be considered in isolation from difference and particularity. We experienced, and continue to experience, the 'same' pandemic in endlessly diverse ways. Even when we cannot avoid generalizing, we should also highlight perspectives that have been overshadowed by the discourse on the common lessons of the pandemic."

Open to new interpretations and challenges

According to Alhojärvi, it is understandable and even necessary to generalize the experiences of the pandemic and draw grander conclusions from them. At the same time, we should recognize the partiality and incompleteness of these generalizations. Different people and groups did not just unambiguously experience the same pandemic.

"Any [common experience](#) or period of time is both shared and divisive. The task of critical research is to clarify any perspectives missing from common generalizations and the forms of power maintained by them."

The "teachings of the pandemic," a fairly widespread and commonplace idea today, presents a methodological challenge for both social and cultural research: How can researchers study something so ubiquitous?

"That things are straightforward is not the be-all and end-all of the matter. We also need to [challenge](#) how we conduct research, from critically examining our presuppositions to remaining open to new interpretations and challenges," says Alhojärvi.

More information: Tuomo Alhojärvi, What Does the Pandemic Teach Us About X? Scenes of Banal Pedagogy, *Diacritics* (2024). [DOI: 10.1353/dia.2023.a930869](#)

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