



‘In Two Places at Once’

Time, Subjectivity and the Academic Profession - Caring Responsibilities and Conference Participation

CHEER, University of Sussex, 30th April 2018, 5pm

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This presentation...

- ▶ Project background
- ▶ Theoretical underpinnings: temporality/academic subjectivity
- ▶ Project design and theoretical underpinnings
- ▶ Findings
- ▶ Discussion/questions

Henderson, E. F. (Forthcoming). 'Academics in Two Places at Once: (Not) Managing Caring Responsibilities at Conferences'. In R. Finkel and B. Sharp (Eds) *Accessibility, Inclusion, and Diversity in Critical Events Studies*. Routledge.

Project Background

- ▶ Lack of (critical, sociological) research on conferences (Henderson, 2015), despite billion-dollar value of industry (Rowe, doctoral work)
- ▶ Emphasis on longer term mobility in studies on academic mobility, studies of work-based travel focus on regular travel
- ▶ Discursive contradiction: conferences represented as BOTH
 - pointless/boring/unnecessary AND
 - vital for disseminating research/making (international) networks/collaborations
- ▶ Conferences as spaces of marked inequality of access: border politics, funding, employment status, disability...**caring responsibilities...**
- ▶ **Access to** conferences v. **access within** conferences (from *Beyond Access*, Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005)



Research questions

- ▶ **'How do academics' caring responsibilities affect their attendance of and participation in conferences?'**
 - What are the **specific factors** of caring responsibilities that impact upon academics' conference attendance/participation?
 - What are the **strategies** that academics employ to manage caring responsibilities while attending conferences? (Including support from the academic's institution or from the conference itself, as well as other sources of support).
 - Do these factors and strategies differ in relation to **international** travel for the purpose of attending conferences?

Theoretical underpinnings 1

“Academic”

- Self-identified
- Call for participants: ‘academic/researcher/teacher in Higher Education/student’
- Importance of including research students and those working in the ‘precariat’
- Gender/intersecting identity characteristics/wariness of identity categories

Care

- Importance of conceptualising academics
 - **Not** unencumbered individuals
 - **But** nodes in a network of relationships
- Self-defined
- Inclusive definition: ‘including children, parents and other relatives, pets, friends and kin’
(Hook, 2016; Jöns, 2011; Leemann, 2010; Moreau & Robertson, 2017; Ralph, 2016)

Theoretical underpinnings 2: Time and academia - common discourses of 'speeding up'

- ▶ 'Individuals...must make decisions quickly in a **world which is fast moving and constantly changing**' (Harris, 2005, p. 421)
 - Harris uses sped-up time to frame her analysis of shifts in academic identities caused by neoliberal policies.
- ▶ Mountz et al.'s manifesto 'For slow scholarship' (2015), begins 'The neoliberal university requires high productivity in ***compressed time frames***' (p. 1236)
- ▶ Common to these accounts of the neoliberal university is a sense of time objectively speeding up, and subjects having to **speed up in order to 'keep up'** (Pereira, 2015).

-> Three understandings of **conference time/academic subjectivity**



1 – External time, passive subject

- ▶ ‘Clock time’ - ‘timetables, targets, production rates and deadlines’ (Adkins 2009 §3.1); ‘invariable hours’ (Adam, 2009, p. 123)
- ▶ ‘The continuous duration of time [is perceived] as a given’ (Lapping, 2016, p. 3)
- ▶ ‘Time presses on, regardless of the subjects that are living by it’ (Henderson, 2018)



2 – External time, active subject

- ▶ Time is still seen as external, but the subject tries to manage/manipulate time
- ▶ Time as ‘a given that is subjectively mediated through a consciousness that structures the subject’s experience of temporality’ (Lapping, 2016, p. 3)
- ▶ Compression, ‘steal[ing] time’, ‘trading periods of time’ (Guzmán-Valenzuela & Barnett, 2013, pp. 1127 & 1131)
- ▶ ‘Outsmarting time’ (Gonzales et al, 2013, p. 1107)
- ▶ ‘Self-governing technologies’ (Nikunen, 2014, p. 120)
- ▶ ‘Subjugation of time to human will’ (Clegg, 2010, p. 347)



3 – Time/subjectivity

- ▶ ‘Time and subjectivity are inextricably produced in and through each other’ (Henderson, 2018)
- ▶ ‘Event time’ – ‘time and phenomena are entirely entangled’ (Adkins, 2009, §4.1)
- ▶ Lapping (2016) – is temporality inherent to the possibility of the subject (and vice versa)?
 - Critique of ‘clock time’ as ‘a construction that supports the fantasy of unified identity’ (p. 3)

Time/subjectivity in relation to caring responsibilities and conferences

1 – External time, passive subject

The schedule as an imperative to attend around a particular timetable

2 – External time, active subject

The schedule as a challenge to overcome – how to obtain maximum benefit from the conference whilst not compromising on care

3 – Time/subjectivity

The disjuncture between the passive and active relationship (with time perceived as external) is a state of ongoing carer-academic subject formation

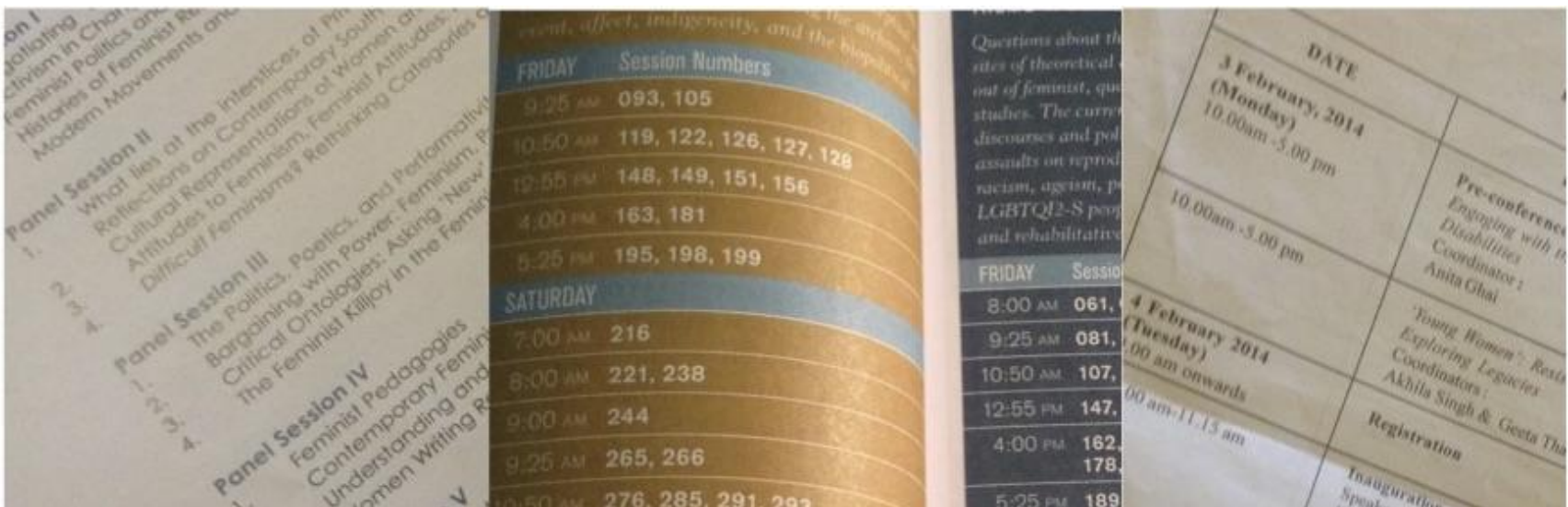


Photo: 'Conference schedules' by Emily F Henderson

Research design

Stage 1: Pre-conference

- Determined conference travel dates/location/s
- Shared research instruments/consent

Why choose to focus on one conference?

Stage 2: Conference

- Questionnaire about arrangements and caring responsibilities for and after the conference
- Time-log of (i) contact with/about CRs, (ii) conversations about CRs, (iii) thoughts relating to CRs (Sullivan & Gershuny, 2017; Wigley, 2017)

Stage 3: Post-conference

- 1-hour interview
- Part I – questions on the time-log and about the conference
- Part II – questions about general conference attending practice/strategy

Did participating affect participants' conference/care experience?

Time-log data collection tool

Date and time	Type of contact (eg. phone call, text, instant messaging chat, thought, conversation...)	Notes on contact (eg. topic, feelings, parts of conference missed...)
Day 1, 10:35	Checked phone	Not liking having the phone on silent – what if I miss a call from nursery?
Day 1, 11:30	Checked phone again	Relief – no missed calls or messages
Day 1, 4:30	Checked phone to see how long until I'll be home	Not long to go!
Day 1, 5:00	Thinking about home	Waiting for bus, which is late – wondering how this will mess up the evening routine

(Adapted from P12's time log for a 1-day conference)

Participants

- ▶ 20 interview participants (+9 questionnaire-only participants)
 - ▶ Mostly UK-based, also included Australia, Austria, Canada, US.
 - ▶ Range of nationalities/mobility trajectories.
 - ▶ Range of disciplines, mainly Social Sciences and Humanities.
 - ▶ Range of institutions and academic positions.
 - ▶ Different ethnicities, religions, relationship types; majority of participants are women.
 - ▶ Conferences ranged from a 1-day event on campus to 1 week+ including international travel to other continents.
 - ▶ Caring responsibilities varied hugely – more on this shortly...
-

More than Just a Few Days

Conference

```
graph TD; Conference[Conference] --> Timeline[Timeline]; Timeline --> Before1[Weeks/months before:]; Timeline --> Before2[Week/days before:]; Timeline --> After1[Week/days after:]; Timeline --> After2[Weeks/months after:];
```

Weeks/months before:

- Negotiate with partner/other support about dates
- Includes previous conferences attended/missed

Week/days before:

- Prepare for those staying behind
 - Food
 - Clothes
 - Instructions

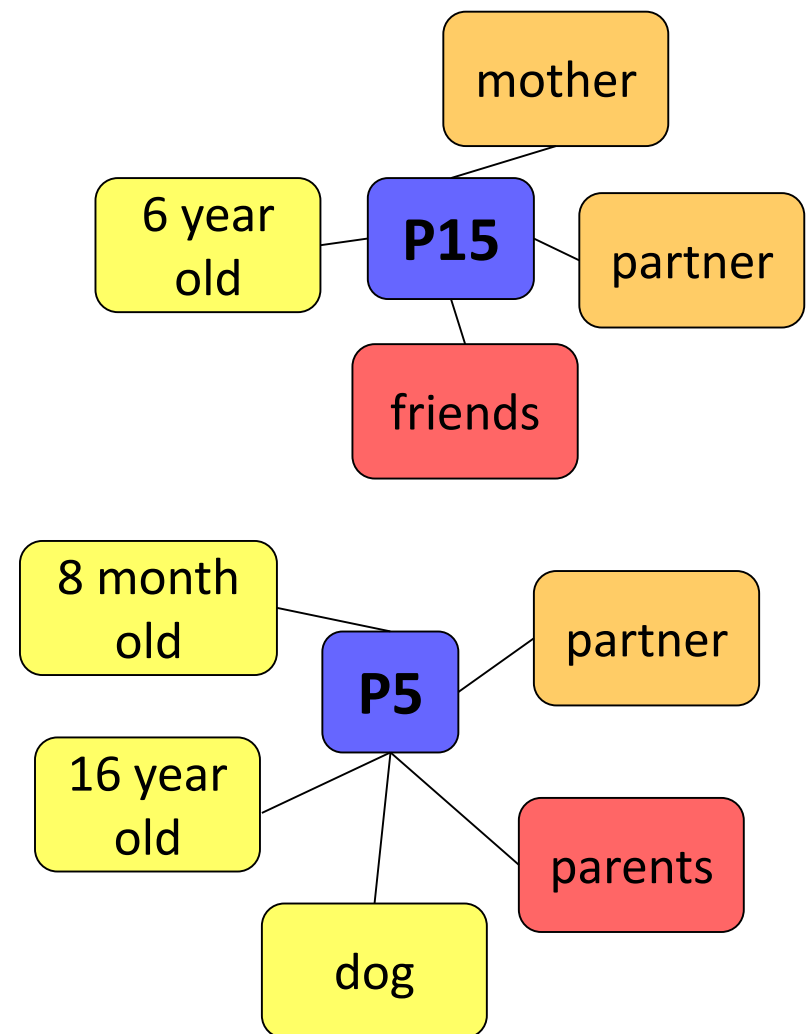
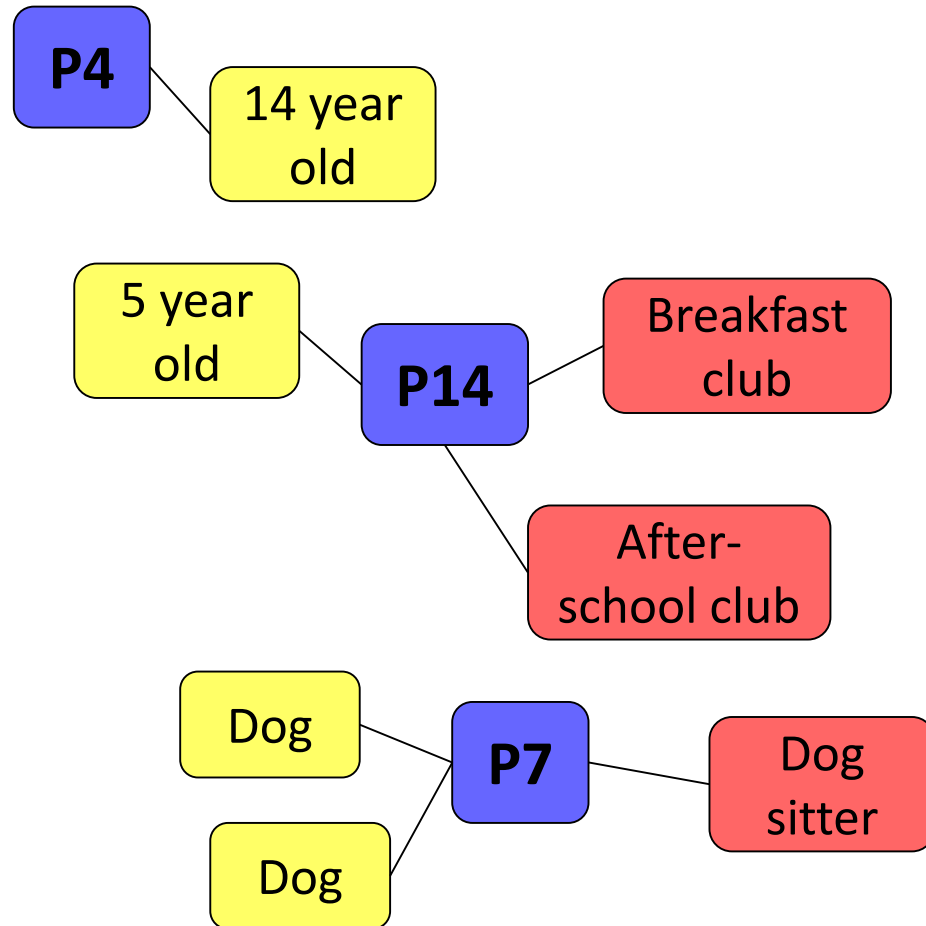
Week/days after:

- Tiredness + lack of time to recover
- Unpacking
- Repairing damage/mess
- Paying bills
- Taking on extra duties to make up for being away

Weeks/months after:

- Partner takes a trip/holiday (bargaining)
- Negotiations for next conferences to attend/miss

Care Constellations



- **Care changes over time** (eg. P20 partner's family member unwell).
- **Effect of academic mobility** (eg. P16's family relocated for her job but her husband doesn't speak the language).
- **Dual career mobility** (eg. P7's partner was on a visiting position in another country at the time of the conference).

Is it Worth it?!

Useful for research

This one was particularly useful to really help my thinking in terms of analysis, and that's what I hoped it would be and it kind of came at the right stage (P12)

No choice?!

In our department, [attending this conference] it's like dead or alive. (P16)

Professional identity

It's good for my career and I was a hundred percent sure that I'm not ready to be just a housewife, stay home mum (P19)

A close balance

I don't know [if it's worth it] and I think this part of been my withdrawal from conferences and stuff over the last few years has been that often, I've put an awful lot of effort into going and it hasn't been worth it.

- Presenting and feedback
 - Interesting papers (but already knew the work)
 - Met people in person after virtual contact
 - Helped to think through ideas
- Whether I got enough out of it, first of all, to have gone through what we did [...] I don't know [...] I would have said it's a close balance. (P15)

Time: Balancing conferences & care

Conference 'clock time'

Beginning of the day

Sessions

Breaks

Transition times

Social times

End of the day

Care activities

The 'check-up'

P35 – 5 text messages exchanged in mid-morning break 'to check everything was ok at home'

The unforeseen incident

P16 – hairdresser messed up her daughter's haircut, led to family conflict (missed sessions, transition time dominated)

What is the most important part of the conference to attend??

Time: Winning and losing against time

Conference 'clock time'

Beginning of the day

Sessions

Breaks

Transition times

Social times

End of the day

Care activities

- Technical hitch in session used to check phone: **WIN!**
- Session presented in another language used to buy birthday present: **WIN!**
- Share the conference by social media with family back home: **WIN!**

- Conference spent checking Facebook about elderly relative **LOSE!**

What is the most important part of the conference to attend??



Afternoon tea time! Which one should I have???

'In Two Places at Once' – the role of technology

- ▶ Mobile technology as a means of maintaining contact – 'absent presence' (Willis et al., 2017)
- ▶ Mobile technology in relation to the time/subjectivity theorisation:
 - A means of 'outsmarting' the *clock time* of a conference.
- ▶ Managing the care routine from a distance
 - Care routine continuing in participants' minds while at conference
 - Checking pick-up had happened
 - Checking nursery app to see if lunch eaten
 - > anxiety when confirmation of care routine not confirmed, also comfort in contact with home
- ▶ Managing the unexpected
 - Sorting out child's disaster haircut
 - Petsitter leaving early
 - > knowledge of the potential for the unexpected to happen can lead to constant vigilance of communication devices

It didn't help that [my partner] didn't reply when I sent a message to just be like, 'Everything okay this morning? Can I just have an update?' - and I wasn't able to ring him (P5)

11 phone calls to partner. I was trying to check they were alright – they had had a difficult afternoon – and I was worried that I could not get hold of them (they had fallen asleep out of earshot of the phone) (P10)

'In Two Places at Once' – phone checking

Q: what/where is your phone?

Answer 1:

Phone as a physical object

- Keep in bag and check in breaks
- Keep on table but face down
- Keep on table, face up, on silent
- Keep in lap
- Observe others' level of phone use and emulate
- Breaks/social time seen as non-conference time

Answer 2:

Phone as in the mind

- Phone experienced as a constant, either checked or waiting to check
- Opportunity to check seen as a relief/guilt pleasure (especially if unforeseen eg. technical hitch)

I don't really like having my phone on silent so it's always kind of in the back of my mind, even though I try not to think about it (P12)

Answer 3:

Phone as family presence

- Phone/device used to share conference experience with family members
- Active, creative, pleasurable phone use eg. selfies and videos, sharing mealtimes

(P66)

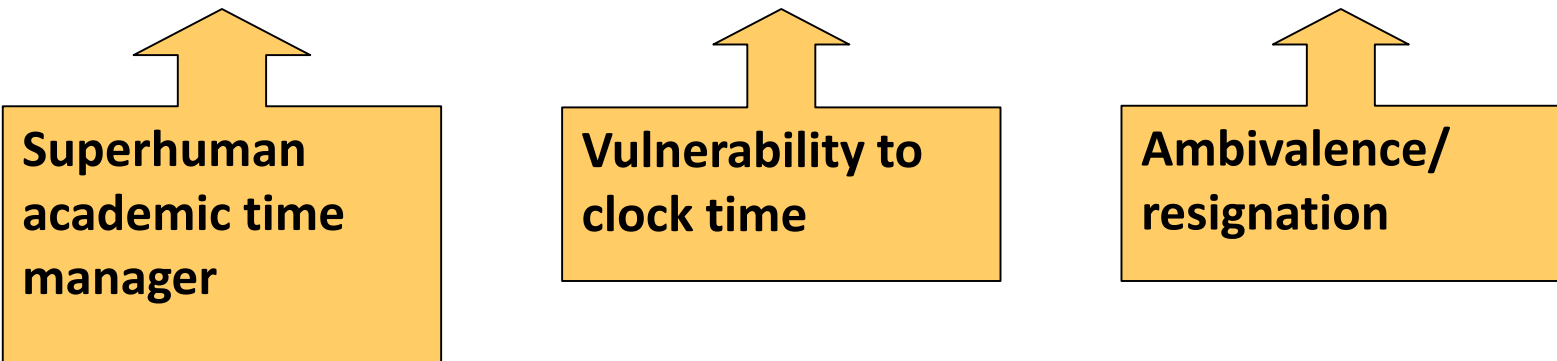


Afternoon tea time! Which one should I have???

Time/subjectivity in relation to caring responsibilities and conferences

3 – Time/subjectivity

The disjuncture between the passive and active relationship (with time perceived as external) is a state of ongoing carer-academic subject formation.



**Superhuman
academic time
manager**

**Vulnerability to
clock time**

**Ambivalence/
resignation**

Next steps

- ▶ Preparing two sets of **briefing notes/recommendations** for HEIs and conference organisers.
- ▶ Preparing a **short film** on the key findings of the project to be shared on social media.
- ▶ Both of the above to be released at a **dissemination symposium** on 12th June 2018 at Warwick.
- ▶ **‘Consultations’** with conference organisers and HEIs (eg BAICE).
- ▶ **Presentations and outputs** see www.warwick.ac.uk/i2po
- ▶ Email e.henderson@warwick.ac.uk to join the project mailing list.



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