

Routledge Research in Higher Education

STUDENT CARERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

**NAVIGATING, RESISTING, AND RE-INVENTING ACADEMIC
CULTURES**

Edited by

Genine Hook, Marie-Pierre Moreau, and Rachel Brooks



Student Carers in Higher Education

This timely volume explores the ways that university institutions affect the experiences of student carers and how student carers negotiate the (often conflicting) demands of care and academic work.

The book maps the experiences of student carers in academic cultures, exploring the intersectional ways in which gender, class, race and other social categories define who can take up a position as a student and a carer. It is framed by concerns of equity and diversity in higher education and ways that diverse people with wide-ranging care responsibilities are able to access and engage with degree-level study. The book promotes the idea of a more inclusive and equitable higher education environment and supports the emergence of more 'care-full' academic cultures which value and recognise care and carers.

The book will be highly relevant reading for academics, researchers and postgraduate students with an interest in higher education, social justice, gender studies and caring responsibilities. It will also be of interest to postgraduate students in sociology of education as well as higher education policymakers.

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Student Carers in Higher Education

Navigating, Resisting, and Re-inventing
Academic Cultures

**Edited by Genine Hook, Marie-Pierre
Moreau, and Rachel Brooks**

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1 Introduction

Genine Hook, Marie-Pierre Moreau, and Rachel Brooks

Student Carers in Higher Education: In/visibilities and Mis/recognition

For several decades now, higher education (HE) systems in many parts of the world have been increasingly concerned with widening participation and lifelong learning. Such concerns have resulted in the implementation across the HE sector of policies and practices which have sought to attract, retain and develop so-called non-traditional students and staff, with varying results (Archer et al., 2003; Bhopal and Henderson, 2021). In many, but not all, instances, students with caring responsibilities (referred hereafter as student carers) have been left out of these conversations.

This edited collection is a timely contribution to addressing the in/visibilities and mis/recognition (Fraser, 1997) that student carers frequently encounter as they attempt to reconcile the oft-conflicting demands of academic and care work. In the countries where we, the editors, are based (Australia and the UK), widening participation has been a long-lasting concern. Yet HE institutions have been battling tensions between, on the one hand, the marketisation and commodification of the sector and, on the other hand, long-lasting, embedded inequalities linked to gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, dis/ability and caring responsibilities (Ivancheva et al., 2019). While data on student carers are scarce, there is evidence that, in many countries, this group is numerically significant and that decades of rising tuition fees and cuts to social care have negatively affected their living conditions (Hook, 2016; NUS, 2013). The Covid-19 pandemic, during which we put this volume together, has also shed light on the centrality of care relationships in people's lives, including students', and has had a disproportionate impact on carers, particularly those from minoritised groups (European Commission, 2021).

Following Lynch (2009), a broad and inclusive definition of carers and care work underpins this collection. It aims to facilitate an understanding of care that captures the diversity of student carer identities (Brooks, 2012; Burford and Hook, 2019; Moreau, 2016; Taylor 2012). Carers include those looking after children, parents, friends and other family and community members. Likewise, we define care work in inclusive ways, which consider, for example, physical, emotional and organisational labour. We are also concerned with the intersectionalities of care (Crenshaw, 1989), i.e. how care interacts with gender, race and other identity

markers. Crucially, we also acknowledge the relational and fluid nature of care work and carers' identities. In other words, we are all embroiled in relations of care-giving and care-receiving (Barnes, 2011), although care work is a highly gendered, classed and raced activity (Moreau and Robertson, 2019). Last, in contrast with deficit views of care as a burden, we acknowledge the societal centrality of care work, how it contributes to maintaining the world we live in (Tronto, 1993) and how the struggles of many student carers are exacerbated by local, national and organisational cultures (Brooks, 2012; Moreau, 2016). This is a marked shift from deficit discourses which construct carers, and student carers in particular, as 'the problem'.

Ultimately, this edited collection is concerned with seeking to expand our understandings and exploration of care in the academy, offering a re-framing of the diverse and intersectional ways in which care can be experienced and the implications of the (oft fraught) relationship between care and academic work for students and institutions. In doing so, we seek to support the emergence of more 'care-full' academic cultures engaging with this group in meaningful ways which go beyond narrowly defined discourses of care, 'access' and 'success' (Burke, 2013; Lynch et al., 2009).

Researching Higher Education, Care and Equity

This collection provides a timely reflection on the significant existing body of work relating to women and care in the academy, for example, by Quinn (2003), Reay (2003), Edwards (1993), Hey (2003, 2006), Hey and Leathwood (2009) and Morley (2013), to only cite a few. We also build on scholarly work that focuses on mothers in the academy, such as that by Mason (2009), Mason et al. (2013), and O'Brien et al. (2012).

The conditions for parents in the academy have been studied extensively by Mason et al. (2013) who note that 'academia does not really offer any good time to have children ... female PhDs may have responded by using adjunct professorships as an imperfect solution to structural problems intrinsic to the academic life course as we have come to know it' (Wolfinger et al., 2009, p. 1613).

An edited collection by O'Brien Hallstein and O'Reilly (2012), *Academic Motherhood in a Post-second wave Context: Challenges, Strategies and Possibilities*, also offers a useful scholarly reference point for this collection. In their introduction, O'Brien Hallstein and O'Reilly (2012) sum up the context of their work relating to academic motherhood as conditions that are 'distinct-to-academia' and describe university conditions that shape the experiences of student carers. They state that

30ish graduate students and academic mothers across disciplines are asking these questions because the context in which they find themselves is shaped by three, often competing and/or contradictory, forces or features: contemporary women's status as post- second wave beneficiaries, the intensive and unbounded career-path and ideal worker norms of academia that center on achieving tenure and promotion, and the demanding and also unbounded requirements of the contemporary ideology of 'good mothering', intensive mothering.

(O'Brien Hallstein and O'Reilly, 2012, p. 3)

In research concerning negotiations of work and family in HE, Wolf-Wendel and Ward (2003) argue that the gendered expectations of family obligations impact on academic lives in particular ways. ‘The clockwork of this career is distinctly male. That is, it is built upon men’s normative paths and assumes freedom from competing responsibilities, such as family, that generally affect women more than men’ (Wolf-Wendel and Ward, 2003, p. 113).

In contrast with the vast scholarship on academic staff, Rosalind Edward’s (1993) work, *Mature Women Students: Separating or Connecting Family and Education*, considers the circumstances under which women attempted to navigate a coexisting family life whilst completing a degree:

Both, ‘the family’ and higher education can be said to act in concert in particular ways for women; as social institutions they, in fact, favour a separating approach to education and family in women’s lives. Family, as a bounded private sphere calls for separation so that outside concerns do not intrude upon the minutiae of its everyday life and relationships, while higher education invites a separative approach so as to ensure objectivity and attention to abstract concepts.

(Edwards, 1993, p. 157)

More recent work in this area highlights that the fraught relationship between mothering and studying persists to this day. Hinton-Smith’s (2012) work critiques the ‘legitimacy of the “Bachelor Boy” model of the ideal student, with its inherent assumption that full participation in the experience of being a university student requires an individual not to have conflicting responsibilities’ (Hinton-Smith, 2012, p. 84).

Similarly, Rachel Brooks’ (2012) comparative study of 68 student-parents in UK and Danish universities found parental and student roles conflicted:

the majority were women who, although committed to their studies, prioritised their responsibilities to their children and identified primarily as a parent rather than as a student...there was a notable absence of familial negotiation: domestic responsibilities had been altered little as a result of study.

(Brooks, 2012, p. 448)

Brooks’ (2012) research work on university student and familial relationships finds

that the few studies that have been conducted in this area have suggested that female student-parents continue to experience considerable pressure to downplay their ‘student’ identity while at home and to retain their role as main caregiver irrespective of the demands of their university course ... both roles [are] often in conflict, student-mothers adopt strategies to minimize such conflict. This involves downplaying their maternal role when they are at university, and concealing their student role when they are outside the university.

(Brooks, 2012, p. 444)

The invisibility of care work emerges as a strong theme in the literature on carers and can be reinforced by a fear of being ‘misrecognised’ as care is often constructed as incompatible with paid work (Moreau, 2016). O’Malley (1999) writes, ‘too often the experience of mothering in academia for me was pretending my children did not exist’ (1999, p. 29). Parental and motherhood norms have been researched by Joan C. Williams (2004) who recognises the ‘maternal wall’ in the academy. Williams (2004) quotes one graduate student-mother who shares that ‘I basically act like I don’t have kids’ (p. 2). Mary Ann Mason (2009) also notes that

many students defer the decision on whether to start a family for the same reasons that I did 30 years ago: They fear they will not be taken seriously and that their professors, mentors, and future employers will discourage them from continuing their studies.

(p. 2)

Marandet and Wainwright also comment on the invisibility of student-parents in their study of an English university, an invisibility also characteristic of institutional data collection processes, which tends to capture gender and other protected characteristics, but not care status (2010).

Concern for exploring the experiences of student carers and other minoritised groups has also shifted to a call for the deconstruction of the care-free, gendered, raced and classed norms that operate in academia. While her focus is not on carers, Penny Jane Burke (2010) advocates for research investigating institutional practices:

It is imperative to pay close attention to the ways in which misrecognitions and power relations are constructed, produced and reinforced within institutional spaces, not least because many institutional practices are re/productive of historical misrecognitions.

(p. 34)

Linked to this, Sara Ahmed (2006) argues that ongoing dialogue concerning equitable engagement with HE is important to enable recognition of education ‘as something that affects “everyone”, at the same time, as it would show how some people more than others are given social and educational advantage’ (p. 763).

More recent studies continue this exploration of how cultures can have an exclusionary effect on minoritised groups, including work by Andrew, Robinson, Costello and Dare (2020), which examined the experiences of mature-age women nursing students in Australia. They found that university structures such as timetabling evening classes and a lack of academic and technological support were key factors that shaped the experiences of university students who balanced study and care. These ongoing university practices reflected and reinforced an understanding of university students as ‘a single, fully autonomous decision maker, able to prioritise university over family and plan schedule changes at short notice’ (pp. 10–11). This also echoes Moreau’s work, conducted in the English context, which identified that student-parents are often constructed through deficit discourses; the challenges they face are actually compounded by national and

institutional cultures and practices which are inhospitable to those with caring responsibilities (Moreau and Kerner, 2015; Moreau, 2016). In particular, Moreau (2016) discusses the limitations and strengths of three main institutional approaches to student-parents in English universities ('universal' or 'care-blind' and 'mainstream') and highlights how, even when policies are considered as 'neutral', they are often unintentionally geared towards the carefree and, as a result, contribute to marginalising those with caring responsibilities.

Our book, *Student Carers in Higher Education: Navigating, Resisting and Re-inventing Academic Cultures*, contributes to the international scholarly field that examines care in the academy. While most of the scholarship has focused on mothers in academia, the impetus for this book is linked to the need to push the boundaries of the definitions of care work and to acknowledge the diverse, intersectional identities of student carers. The collective contribution highlights the complexity of experiences for students who care, examining the diversity of students and the enabling and constraining factors that constitute participation and success. Our aim is not only to draw attention to the complexity of participation for many student carers but also to foreground the possibilities and ethics of building momentum towards a 'care-centric' HE.

Volume Overview

Following this introduction, this volume opens with a piece by Kathleen Lynch. In her chapter (*Affective equality in higher education: Resisting the culture of carelessness*), Lynch argues that the 'smart economy ideology of neoliberal capitalism not only impacts on staff, but it also impacts on students in terms of affective care relations'. While acknowledging that 'carefreeness' preceded neoliberalism, this chapter highlights how, in contemporary times, neoliberal policies permeating HE in Ireland and other national contexts have reinforced academic cultures of 'carefreeness', despite a growing concern for equity and widening participation. In the light of the social justice implications of care-free norms, this chapter is also a call to resist these and imagine more inclusive cultures for student (and staff) carers, with affective care relations identified as one potential site of resistance.

Focusing on emotions and affect is precisely what the following chapter (*Negotiating embodied aspirations: Exploring the emotional labour of higher education persistence for female caregivers*), by Sarah O'Shea, does. In this piece, O'Shea concentrates on how mothers who are also 'first in their family' to attend university perform persistence in the context of demanding caring responsibilities. Drawing on Ahmed (2004), O'Shea explores how the spatial and material conditions of university attendance translate at a deeply embodied level among the student-mothers she talked to, all of them studying towards an undergraduate degree at an Australian university.

While the emotional costs of managing a dual identity as a student carer are often absent from policy interventions, O'Shea demonstrates how the 'student experience', particularly those of student carers, is extensively framed by emotions.

Belonging, space and the marginalisation of university childcare, by Genine Hook, continues this exploration of the conflicting demands of mothering and

academic norms, also in the Australian context. Following from Yuval-Davis' (2011) ethics of care, Hook focuses on the linkage of the spatial arrangements of childcare and educational engagement. Drawing on interviews with student-parents, she establishes that this group interprets the spatial arrangements for childcare on the outside margins of university campuses as exclusionary and concludes that 'the maps of Australian university campuses become the mechanism for understanding the interrelatedness of student parent belonging within university spaces'.

In *Anything but 'carelessness': Employed student-mothers' experiences of low-status vocational higher education*, Paul Smith continues this exploration of the complex and, at times, complicated, relationship between parenting and studying, adding to this equation another component: paid work. Drawing on a Bourdieusian framework, Smith explores the narratives of student-mothers enrolled on a foundation degree aiming to 'upskill' and retain school-based teaching assistants in the North of England. The chapter highlights the struggles of this group as they navigate parenting, HE and a form of employment bestowing limited access to economic, cultural and social capital. Ultimately, it shows how 'the emotional experiences of this group of student-carers were therefore not only informed by their dual status of student and parent, but also embedded notions of care within their workplace identities'.

In *'A space for me, but what about my family?': The experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller student carers in UK higher education*, Christine Browne, Chelsea McDonagh and Colin Clark explore a group which has been considerably marginalised, including in terms of access to and broader experiences of HE. While Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students entering UK HE institutions have been the subject of growing attention in recent years, very little is known about what happens *outside and away from* classrooms and campus. Drawing on extant research as well as auto-ethnographical insights and reflections, the chapter provides an in-depth account of the intersections of care and HE for a group whose association with both has often been constructed through a deficit lens. Exploring avenues for change, the chapter argues that 'if colleges and Universities are serious about the inclusion of students from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds, they need to be pro-active *off-campus* as well as *on-campus*' and provide support that acknowledge the multi-layered inequalities experienced by this group, including when they do access Higher Education.

Resisting colonisation: Indigenous student-parents' experiences of higher education, by Rebecca D. Cox and Michelle Pidgeon, pursues this analysis of the entanglements of care and learning among those subjected to multiple discriminations, in this case Indigenous Canadian students. Drawing on qualitative interview data from two discrete studies, the chapter provides a welcome focus on the experiences of nine Indigenous students involved in postsecondary education while caring for children. The primacy and power of Indigenous students' family support and cultural connections highlight the impoverished and narrow version of postsecondary education that pits caregiving responsibilities against academic study in policy circles. In contrast to the policy agenda, Cox and Pidgeon argue that 'the teachings of the Indigenous student-parents ... offer a more transformative vision of support, specifically, structures, policies, and practices that recognize and value students'

wholistic (integrated) identities as women, mothers, students, and Indigenous people’.

In *How the ‘caring chain’ impacts the decision to study abroad, overseas experiences and career plan: A narrative analysis about a Chinese single mother*, Xuemeng Cao explores intergenerational care work in the context of study abroad, a field which, with a few exceptions (e.g. Loveridge et al., 2018), has given limited consideration to international students with caring responsibilities. Drawing on a longitudinal qualitative study and the use of research diaries, Xuemeng explores the story of one particular participant: a single mother who was accompanied by her daughter, mother and grandmother during her one-year taught master’s course in the UK. Cao’s analysis highlights how gender, family structure and care work frame Chinese students’ study-abroad experiences and career-related considerations.

Doctoral carers: Tracing contradictory discourses and identifying possibilities for a more care-full doctoral education, by James Burford and Cat Mitchell, also uses unconventional methods to engage with the complexities and conflicts of ‘care-giving’ and ‘doctoral candidature’. Analysing two self-portraits and related diary-interview data produced by Gertie, a New Zealand-based doctoral candidate, they ask which gendered bodies are un/thinkable as carers in doctoral education and doctoral education research, while simultaneously considering new, queer possibilities for linking together doctoral and care work.

In *Fragmented perceptions of institutional support for food-insecure student-parents*, Margaret W. Sallee, Christopher Kohler, Luke Haumesser and Joshua Hine consider an issue which has attracted limited consideration in policy and research circles: food insecurity on HE campuses. Drawing on interviews with multiple stakeholders at one US-based university, they examine the delivery of institutional supports for food-insecure students and the ways in which they acknowledge or erase food-insecure student-parents’ multiple identities. Their analysis highlights how campus spaces and activities can construct the normative student as both childless and food secure, resulting in additive institutional efforts rather than fully integrated approaches to alleviating food insecurity among student-parents.

It’s not only me doing things for me’: Conference participation for doctoral students with caring responsibilities, by Emily Henderson, turns to a space often considered as vital for the growth of doctoral students and early career researchers: conferences. Yet attending conferences presents doctoral students and academics with caring responsibilities with challenges. Drawing on the ‘In Two Places at Once’ project (Henderson et al., 2018), which used a diary-interview method, the chapter focuses on participants who were doctoral students in the UK and their experiences of negotiating conference attendance and care.

Altogether, these chapters provide an overview of the experiences of student carers in their complexity, diversity and intersectionalities. They contribute to a more sophisticated understanding of the entangling of personal biographies with academic, organisational and national cultures. By encompassing a diversity of organisational and national contexts, they also open a space to reflect on the diversity of student carers’ experiences and, ultimately, to identify practices and policies troubling the care-free norms of academia and likely to favour the emergence of more inclusive, ‘care-full’ cultures.

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2 Affective Equality in Higher Education

Resisting the Culture of Carelessness

Kathleen Lynch

Introduction

By placing higher education in historical context, one can see how the long tradition of male-defined and male-controlled higher education has made universities inhospitable places for women and for carers. The chapter opens with a discussion of how difficult it has been for women to gain parity with men in this inhospitable cultural milieu; the first challenge in entering universities was to be taken seriously.

Universities operate in a gendered order society in which masculinities and femininities are defined in polarised ways (Pateman, 1988; Bubeck, 1995; Connell, 1995). As men are identified with the cognitive-rational end of the binary and women with the emotional end, the implications of these gendered binaries for higher education are explored in the following section. It examines the ways in which affective relations of love, care and solidarity are defined as peripheral to education.

Universities are not only male-controlled institutions; they are also large bureaucracies; as such they operate on different relational logics to care relations (Mol, 2008). The ways in which the bureaucratic structures of universities pose challenges for caring generally, and student carers in particular, are examined in the third section.

In an era dominated by neoliberal capitalism, universities are also defined as market actors competing intensely both nationally and internationally for status, money and power (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Hazelkorn, 2011). The final part of the chapter explores how universities are increasingly required to operate according to market logics, showing a return on investment in human capital terms (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997; Peters, 2005, 2016; Jessop, 2008; Shore and Wright, 2017; Cannizzo, 2018), while also demonstrating the different ways in which students resist this consumerisation of their identities (Lolich, 2015, Lolich and Lynch, 2017; Brooks and Abrahams, 2021).

The rise in new managerial logics that follow from incorporating market values into higher education has exacerbated the careless culture of higher education (Devine et al., 2011; Lynch, 2010; Cardozo, 2017). This has impacted adversely on women especially (Bailyn, 2003; Benschop and Brouns, 2003; Metcalfe and Slaughter, 2008; Gill, 2009; Bomert and Leinfellner, 2017; Lynch et al., 2020), but

also on students who are carers (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Lolich, 2015; Lolich and Lynch, 2017; Kulp, 2020).

Despite these major developments, there is scope for resistance and change. Part of this change is challenging the dominant neoliberal narrative and placing affective equality centre stage in debates about social justice in higher education. The path to commercialisation and carelessness in higher education is not predetermined; universities can become more caring places for staff and students, not least by developing care-centric thinking and practices within their own disciplines.

The 'Males-Only' Tradition

The cultural norms of university education have deep roots in history. Even though universities vary in form and origin, from the Imperial Academy (Taixue) in China (206 BC–220 AD), to Abbasid's House of Wisdom in Baghdad (the 9th to the 13th century AD), to the medieval Cathedral schools¹ of Europe beginning in the 11th century (Stothoff Badeau and Hayes, 1976, Kaviani et al., 2012), early universities were primarily focused on educating men, as clergy, as church administrators or, in the case of China, as civil servants. The academy both created and consolidated the concept of feminine subservience and academic inferiority. Universities provided rationalisations for refusing women entry, including promulgating the belief that they lacked the analytical and theoretical skills of men. While Plato's *Republic* recognised that women² had intellectual capacities, that they had *the same nature in respect to the guardianship of the state, save insofar as the one is weaker and the other is stronger*,³ his pupil, Aristotle, did not (Smith, 1983: 467). Aristotle claimed women (and slaves) were lacking full deliberative powers, a full 'soul'.⁴ He claimed, quoting Sophocles, that 'Silence gives grace to woman', but not to man (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1260a). As Aristotle exercised great influence over intellectual thought, including thinking about education, his patriarchal views had a profound influence on women over time.

The medieval view of women was not much different from the Aristotelian one. Within medieval theology, masculinity was equated with the mind and spirit, femininity with the body and emotions. The social binaries of mind-body and nature-society, emanating from the philosophy of René Descartes and scientists such as Francis Bacon, defined women as part of 'Nature' rather than 'Society', and as such, subject to domination and control (Patel and Moore, 2018). These polarised images of men as intellectual beings and women as physical feeling beings underpinned the belief that being a scholar or a scientist and being a woman were mutually exclusive. Women were regarded as too emotional and lacking objectivity to hold public office, and as distractions for men at their scientific work. Wise, powerful or inquisitive women were feared and even demonised as witches (Sollée, 2017).

Rousseau, one of the most influential educationalists in Europe from the 18th century onwards, devoted four books to the education of the male student, *Émile*, and one, the fifth book, to 'Sophie, or The Woman'. The latter opens with highly patriarchal discussions on gender roles. Sophie, and women generally, are represented as *passive and weak* dependents, people who were unable to cultivate reason. Rousseau claimed that women should not enjoy political rights equal to those of

men due to their reasoning deficits; following from this, they were not deemed fit for public office. He assumed women would marry (men), and live subservient to and dependent on their husbands. He feared the intellectual development of a woman could lead to her *neglect of her duty, as wife and mother*. For that reason he did not think they needed formal independent education. Émile is left to tutor Sophie when they meet, as Rousseau regarded wives as *pupils* of their husbands thereby institutionalising the idea of male intellectual and social superiority (Greentree, 2017: 75 citing Rousseau, *Emile* (4:128)). Given that public and political life were regarded as spheres governed by the laws of abstract rationality, devoid of emotion and feeling, the reason/emotion binary provided the perfect rationale for excluding women from public life. What Rousseau did was to provide further justification for their exclusion from professional and public life, by denying them formal education.

The belief that women should remain silent and subservient was carried through into the late 19th century and early 20th century. It was evident in a US Supreme Court decision in 1872 denying Myra Bradwell a licence to practise law in the state of Illinois on the grounds that ‘the natural and proper timidity and delicacy which belongs to the female sex evidently unfits it for many of the occupations of civil life’ (Nussbaum, 1995: 364). The exclusion of women from education meant they were excluded from gaining employment and financial independence. Women’s ‘emotionality’ and lack of education also informed the belief that women should not be granted the right to vote on a par with men, rights that they won in most countries only in the 20th century.

While contemporary developmental psychology has disabused us of the 18th- and 19th-century myths about the division between emotions and reason (Gardner, 1983; Goleman, 1995; Barrett and Salovey, 2002), the historical fallout from highly patriarchal views of women’s intelligences and capabilities prevailed for a long time in education, with women only entering universities in equal numbers to men in the later 20th century.

The Gendered Social Order and Education

From the early research of Nancy Chodorow (1978) and Carol Gilligan (1982), and that of multiple social scientists and developmental psychologists over the past 50 years, we know that girls and boys, women and men are socialised very differently in families, schools and throughout society (Connell, 1987). Girls’ and women’s agency is morally and emotionally framed in terms of their relational attachments and commitments; their relationalities define the parameters of their femininities in a way that does not apply to men (Gilligan, 1982; Ruddick, 1989). For boys and men, dominance is the hegemonic normative framework governing their masculinities (Connell, 1995, 2002).

The implications of these gendered socialisations are profound and long-lasting. The relational framework operates through an ethic of other-centredness, while the dominance logic of hegemonic masculinity operates within an ethic of control and power (Connell, 1995). There is a moral imperative on women to care (Bubeck, 1995), to think of the vulnerable other, while men are socialised to think of

avoiding vulnerability, and getting and being in power (Connell, 1995; Hearn and Parkin, 2001). While these gender binaries do not apply across all families, all cultures and all periods of history, they remain powerful and hegemonic throughout the world. Girls and women remain the default carers in families and households globally (Oxfam, 2020). The equation of femininity with relationality binds girls and women to care work.

Given the interface between masculinity and political and economic power, especially in an era of globalised capitalism (Connell and Wood, 2005), and the hegemony of male-dominated free-market economics in framing policy discourses (Folbre, 2001), including those of higher education (Jessop, 2008), the definition of the valued educated persona has been re-masculinised in economic terms. The ideal (male) educated person is one who exercises actuarial rationality (Peters, 2005). They are rational economic actors (Becker, 1964), separate and soluble (England, 2003; Nelson, 2003), winners in the competition for valuable market positions, but not carers (Folbre, 2001). The concept of the citizen as an economic actor translates into educational policies oriented to educating students as units of human capital for the economy (Peters, 2016).

The prioritisation of the market in creating the educated person is reflected in curricular changes and priorities. Subjects that are market-led are heavily promoted in higher education, and students who study these are heavily subsidised especially in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields.⁵ As men dominate the STEM subjects, men are disproportionate beneficiaries of STEM prioritisation. Even when women enter the holy place of STEM, they do so on male terms, adapting their femininities 'to a masculinist work environment' (O'Connor et al., 2018: 313). The prioritisation of STEM has been complemented by the downgrading of arts and humanities, and critical social sciences (Rutherford, 2005), while the individualised competitive ethos that follows logically from its market focus has also undermined caring in the academy (Downing, 2017).

Higher Education as Bureaucracies

Recognising the ways in which the history of male control, and the contemporary emphasis on entrepreneurialism, have made universities care-disregarding, is not to suggest that the operations of universities as large bureaucracies, in and of themselves, are insignificant in care terms.

Most higher education institutions are governed by bureaucratic principles of 'rationally ordered societal action' (Weber, 1946: 228). While bureaucratic structures enable services to be provided in a systematic and ordered manner, they work on operational procedures and rules that generally do not take account of the particularities of persons and contexts. The so-called 'universalistic principles' of bureaucracies (Weber, 1978: 975) generally fail to take account of the contingent variability of individual situations, and especially of human differences in gender, care, racial and dis-ability terms. The 'disembodied' mind, like the 'universal' citizen of the philosophy of Enlightenment, conceals 'a White masculine body, which, because it is unmarked and is taken to be the norm, remains invisible' (Moreau, 2016: 907).

The problem rests on the way the inherent logic of bureaucratic regulation and organisation is neither gender (Acker, 1990) nor race-neutral (Ahmed, 2012); neither is it care neutral. The time logics of caring are at variance with the logic of bureaucracies and clock time. Most large bureaucratic institutions have been designed and run by powerful men, men who are generally free from daily hands-on caring. The instrumental goals of the organisation are prioritised, as meeting output targets is the *raison d'être* of bureaucracies. While care work may be the socioemotional glue binding people together, this underground caring labour is generally invisible at the centres of power. The strong instrumentalism that is endemic to output-driven bureaucratic organisations, like universities in a neoliberalised era of intense competitiveness, further invisibilises the care infrastructure that enables organisations to function effectively through time.

The combined impact of bureaucratic procedures in universities, and their long gendered, raced and classed history, has meant that student carers do not register naturally on their mind map. The care-free, time adaptable, concept of the 'universal' student prevails. As in other bureaucracies, life in universities is mediated, managed and produced by clock time: caring is expected to have a clear beginning and ending that can be calculated and measured and produced in defined times (Andersen and Bengtsson, 2020). But caring cannot be provided in this way as the work has a fluid, relational and cyclical-temporal logic (Bryson, 2007). Caring cannot be completed in measurable time as it is a process, a disposition, a way of living out relationships (Mol, 2008) that metrics cannot assess.

The conflict between bureaucratic logic and care logic is a major matter of concern for student carers. Student-parents' care responsibilities are not governed by strict clock time, while their classes, examinations, assignments and deadlines are. Alsop et al.'s (2008) study of 1,000 mature students in Hull University found that balancing the time demands of their role as students and carers was the single biggest problem reported by mature students, both full-time and part-time. Similar findings emanate from a study of Irish mature students (Kearns, 2017). It was carers, especially female carers, who were most adversely affected by rigid timetable regimes. In the words of one of Kearns' interviewees, 'It seems like everything is arranged around the idea that students can just turn up whenever. Some of us are not eighteen anymore' (Kearns, 2017: 190). Student carers face urgent and immediate care demands that have to be prioritised over college schedules and deadlines: a sick baby cannot be left unattended, and small children have to be washed, fed and cared for on a daily basis. A universalistic non-relational concept of students fails to take account of this.

The ideal scholar still comes in a masculinised, 'bachelor boy', care-free, body (Lloyd, 1993; Leathwood and Hey, 2009; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Moreau, 2016). The narrative of the typical student as young, 'coming of age,' 'partying' and 'feckless' is a widespread trope about university students in popular culture. It is reflected in the prize-winning novel and film *Normal People* (2018), where two young school leavers are exploring their sexuality and their identities in college. Such narratives reinforce the narrative that students are young and unattached, learning and experimenting with life and love, persons without care responsibilities.

While the concept of the normal student can be altered to accommodate carers, to do so is a major challenge for universities that were never designed with

carer-students in mind. The fact that most of those who design, plan and exercise control over contemporary universities at senior management level are men (O'Connor, 2014, 2015),⁶ who, given their age and elite profile, are not hands-on carers, prolongs this historical carelessness. While accommodations have been made for carers, including supports for mothers on returning from maternity leave, or the provision of financial supports for students who are lone parents, these do not apply in all countries. Moreover, they are presented as special concessions rather than as rights, and apply more consistently to staff rather than to students, as they are granted under labour regulations that do not apply to students.

Human Capital, the Academy and Care

An indifference to the affective care domain and an allegiance to the education of the rational autonomous subject have been at the heart of formal education for a long period of history (Noddings, 1984, 2001). While care was never a highly prized value in most of formal education (Lynch et al., 2007), the encoding of market values across the public sector (Clarke and Newman, 1997), and especially in the academy (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997), has accelerated the peripheralisation of care (Lynch, 2010; Lolich, 2011; Lynch et al., 2012; Moreau and Kerner, 2015). The focus is on outputs, with students defined as consumers who can help balance the budget in the first instance. They are also seen as a potential resource that enriches the university's human capital 'stock', a stock that will be translated into enhanced market capacities when they leave.

When the OECD (1996) gave its endorsement to the human-capital theory of education, in *Knowledge-Based Economy*,⁷ the belief in education as a mechanism of wealth creation, through investment in people's skills, gained widespread currency across the world. It has subsequently been endorsed by the EU in the Lisbon Agreement, and by many nation states through a variety of reports and policy initiatives.⁸ Universities are seen as key sites for the development of human capital in the service of the so-called knowledge-based-economy (KBE) (Jessop, 2008), where knowledge is equated with commercially relevant learning. Although based on a 'highly functionalist view of education in service of the multinationals' (Peters, 2001: 13), the human capital perspective remains a guiding principle of higher education globally. Developing the caring capacities of students is not defined as part of that capital unless it is serving some professional or wealth creation purpose.

While students in care-related professions such as social workers, teachers and nurses are educated to care professionally, care is seen as servicing other goals, be it health, welfare or education. It has an ancillary, rather than a core, status. Those working in other professions, be it engineering, business, science or technology, are not generally educated about care *per se*, while in the business sphere, the values and more of corporate capitalism undermine values such as caring for others (Kasser et al., 2007). While there is much talk about corporate social responsibility, its policies and practices are more frequently honoured in the breach than in the observance. Corporate social responsibility is frequently a marketing and branding exercise for corporations, many of which are neither caring nor socially responsible (Fleming and Jones, 2013).

Carers and the Neoliberal Academy

To understand the place of student carers in the academy, it is necessary to locate them in the wider cultural milieu of universities. In a neoliberal era, there is an expectation not only that universities should be self-funding, but that they should, where possible, be profit-making through increased commercialisation and privatisation (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Shore and Wright, 2017). Universities are driven by competitive advantage, much like other large corporations, vying with each other to increase their market share of the most lucrative students, research funding and grants (Hazelkorn, 2011).

Research-led universities are especially exacting; they command high levels of commitment, time and energy for both genders, leading to conflict between paid work and care work (Fox et al., 2011). The ideal academic is increasingly one 'with no interests or responsibilities outside of work' (Bailyn, 2003; Benschop and Brouns, 2003; Moreau et al., 2007; Grummell et al., 2009), a 'Benchmark Man' (Thornton, 2013) unhindered by domestic or care responsibilities. Incessant productivity is demanded in the context of corporatised competition between universities and declining state investment in public services, especially in public universities (Wright and Shore, 2017). Given that modern scholars do not live in medieval monasteries with backup services, the prevailing model of the ideal scholar defines those who have care responsibilities as outsiders, the higher education cultural milieu is very inhospitable to caring.

Students and Caring

When a university's prestige, status and future are conditional on being successful, it is in their interests to recruit not only the most successful staff but also the potentially most successful and/or financially lucrative students. Students who require extra supports due to their dis-abilities, age, family status, social class and/or ethnic differences, or care responsibilities, require extra investment in terms of time and resources. While they may be included because government policy requires it, or because they provide a type of moral mud-flap for an otherwise difference-indifferent academy, they also bring costs, ones that prestigious and powerful universities are keen to avoid.

Although there is a severe deficit of data on student carers (Moreau, 2016), there is a lot of data on social class indicating how reluctant elite universities are to accommodate students who are not traditional entrants (Shavit, 2007; Triventi, 2013; Reay, 2018).⁹ Primary care-givers, most of whom are women, like people who are working class (Adair, 2001), or those whose skin is brown or black (Ahmed, 2012), do not quite fit the 'shapes' required by higher education organisations. They are strangers in their social origins, appearance, tastes, lifestyles and/or accents, invoking emotions of fear among normal community members (Ahmed, 2004). Even if one does have the required 'shape', both literally and metaphorically for the university, to feel 'at home' in academia is a challenge given the institutionalised white, middle-class, male-controlled genealogy of its cultural heritage (Adair et al., 2007, Ahmed, 2012, O'Connor, 2014; Reay, 2018).

Just as the ideal academic is assumed to be carefree, it comes as no surprise that the normal student is seen as ‘an autonomous individual unencumbered by domestic responsibilities, poverty or self-doubt’ (Leathwood and O’Connell, 2003: 599). The pressures to perform as students is not only personal, it is also institutional. When the academy is competing on the global market, the reputation of a university is affected by its students’ performance and their completion rates. Where students are ‘placed’ in occupational terms, and what post-college salaries they can command are included in the rankings and ratings of universities. The status of the university is also impacted by student performances within the internal market of higher education itself: the prestige of the universities, where postgraduate or post-doctoral scholars are based, feeds back into the reputation of the graduating university. Students are not just ‘consumers’ in the market of higher education; they are also ‘products’ in that market. Their performances impact on them personally in career terms, while also impacting on the profile of their universities. And while there is considerable evidence that mature students (who are more likely to be carers) achieve higher grades on average in college than younger students (Cantwell et al., 2001; McKenzie and Gow, 2004; Sheard, 2009), this has not translated into policies welcoming them into higher education.

What is ironic about the operationalisation of a diversity agenda in contemporary universities, is that, although they have a more diverse intake than they had historically,¹⁰ many have not adapted to accommodate new entrants; for example, many have encouraged mature students to return to higher education, yet their care responsibilities have been treated as marginal considerations, where and when they are recognised¹¹ (Alsop et al., 2008; Moreau and Kerner, 2015; Kearns, 2017; Dickson, 2019). Lone mothers, especially those who are poor and without supports, find it difficult to survive and succeed in higher education, even though they have so much to gain (Hinton-Smith, 2016; Kearns, 2017; Kensinger et al., 2018; Lindsay and Gillum, 2018).

Brooks’ (2012) study of student-parents’ experience in Denmark and England shows, however, that national politics, especially child welfare and childcare policies, impact on student carers’ experience within a given country. Denmark’s substantive investment in childcare enables students to be parents in a way that is not true of the UK (or Ireland and many other countries) where such provisions do not exist. While student-parents struggled in UK universities, especially those in under-resourced newer universities, with limited supports, Danish student-parents were adequately supported regardless of university type. They were able to avail of both maternity and paternity grants, and were accommodated with flexible timetables and examination arrangements.

While much of the study of student carers has focused on undergraduates, Kulp’s (2020) study of 2,200 PhD student-mothers in the United States shows that parenting remains a significant barrier to advancement at this advanced level of higher education. Kulp found that while mothers who graduate with PhDs from prestigious research universities are not especially disadvantaged in getting tenure-track posts after graduation,¹² a very small proportion of student-mothers complete PhDs in top-ranked institutions in the first place. Students who were mothers while doing PhDs were more frequently located ‘at non-research institutions

including comprehensive, liberal arts, 2-year, and special focus institutions than at research universities' (Kulp, 2020: 422). This suggests that successful PhD student-mothers are self-selecting away from prestigious universities where the demands for high levels of research productivity are perceived to be incompatible with care responsibilities.

That this happens is not surprising as the incessant productivity and mobility of conferencing and networking that is required to flourish on a global stage for PhD scholars is not an option for many, especially those who are the primary hands-on carers, most of whom are women (Mason et al., 2013). PhD students who are mothering do not fit the ideal profile of the future 'star' academic (Bomert and Leinfellner, 2017; Dubois-Shaik and Fusulier, 2017). While there are the exceptions who combine 'stardom' with family care, others make themselves fit by sacrificing their own relational life; they may gain senior professorial positions and global status but at the cost of affective relational precarity, especially if they are women (Ivancheva et al., 2019).

Ireland

Research undertaken by the author over 20 years ago (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1998) found that there were few supports for single parents at that time, especially in terms of subsidised childcare. One single mother recalled how 'she cried her eyes out' over the costs of childcare, while another spoke of how she experienced sexist comments in a predominantly male higher education college. She found the culture 'quite intimidating' as young single men made '... snide remarks about me being a single mother' (ibid.: 468). More recent research in Ireland shows that student carers, most of whom are women, still face considerable barriers: Kearns' (2017) research illustrated that mature students who were parenting alone found the cost of childcare to be prohibitive. Others spoke of how colleges did not give any special consideration to those with care responsibilities when organising timetables for lectures and tutorials. There was a basic assumption that students were young and unattached, and especially that they did not have dependent children (Kearns, 2017: 188–190).

Lolich's (2015) online survey research with 4,265 higher education students in Ireland¹³ (which examined students' experiences of higher education generally) reported similar findings. Student carers found it 'very hard' 'trying to balance home and children with college'. For those who were working full time and studying, it was a struggle working by day, attending college at night, as well as minding children. Some student carers were very critical of the universities, with one law and business student undergraduate claiming: 'The college forgets about students with families to raise, who also work to support said families once they have enticed them to enrol and pay the enormous fees' (Lolich and Lynch, 2017: 125).

Student Resistance to the Consumerist View of Higher Education

While it is sometimes assumed that students are simply a *tabula rasa* for the development of human capital for the 'smart economy', such is not the case. While higher

education success may be defined in terms of getting a degree and a high financial return for one's educational investment over time, students do not always follow this mantra (Beilin, 2016). There is dissent and resistance. Brooks and Abrahams' (2021) analysis of how students perceived themselves within higher education (across six European countries) shows that students vary cross-culturally in terms of how they define themselves, and what they value in higher education. While students generally define themselves as 'hard workers', they do not have a purely instrumentalist view of higher education. They resist being categorised as simple consumers, citing their love of learning as an important reason for being in college.

Lolich's study of over 4,000 students' attitudes to the idea of being educated for the 'smart economy' demonstrated that student priorities are not always what they are assumed to be by policy-makers; their values are not simply market or career led (Lolich, 2015). While the students valued good employment, and the economic and personal security it brings, they also had interests, values and priorities outside of this. Deploying international survey instruments for studying student values, the study found that while 'Becoming an expert in my field' was the top priority value, 'Helping others who are in difficulty' and 'Raising a family' were second and third priority values respectively (Lolich and Lynch, 2017: 120).

Although students in Lolich's (2015) study did subscribe to the human capital narrative of the 'smart economy', seeing it as an economic necessity, they also resisted it. While they placed a priority on obtaining employment, they also planned their futures in terms of contributing to society and having a good family life. They were mindful of servicing others and having a secure life in terms of their affective care relations; they did not see life solely in terms of being economic actors, making money and developing careers. These findings concur with those of O'Shea and Delahunty (2018) in Australia where students' sense of educational success included a range of personal goals, including doing something that they believed in, following their dreams and contributing to society.

Conclusion: New Managerialism, Commercialisation and Student Resistance

Since the late 1980s, the rising power of neoliberalism as a political ideology has promoted a disinvestment in public services throughout most Western countries (Harvey, 2005). The encoding of market values within public services has complemented this disinvestment. The implementation of new managerial practices, incorporating market-led policies and practices into the governance of public bodies, is widespread (Clarke and Newman, 1997). It has been especially pervasive in higher education (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Wright and Shore, 2017), where a focus on productivity and outputs regardless of inputs has extended, and reconstituted, indifference to care matters (Lynch et al., 2012, 2019).

Equality policies have been deprioritised in the interests of diversity where diversity means increasing the intake of students from third countries who are either state-funded or personally wealthy. Within the university sector, education for social, cultural and relational life outside the market economy has been deprioritised. Nowhere is that more evident than in the failure to invest in the

humanities and critical social sciences, relative to STEM subjects. Not only is care devalued at the boundaries of family and paid work (Raddon, 2002; O'Hagan et al., 2019), the care of the self (Gill, 2009) and the care work required for good teaching and learning are also being undermined (Cardozo, 2017; Downing, 2017).

Capitalism, and especially the capitalist economy, may be hegemonic, but it is not monolithic and incontestable. In order to develop new concepts, new understandings of resistance to social injustices we must move outside the frame of the master's house of capitalism and capitalist ethics especially in higher education. It is time to recognise that care is a fundamental value within education and that students themselves prioritise care and public service values; they see their education as helping them to realise these goals. It is time for higher education to move out of the 'master's house' of neoliberal capitalism, and all that it entails, when education is built on such a narrow instrumentalist view of society.

Taking affective equality seriously is not only about how staff and student carers are facilitated and encouraged in higher education, but also about how curricula in higher education are made care- and social justice-focused, in both human and environmental terms. It is time for the ethics of care, equality and social justice to replace the ethics of capitalism in the academy. As Tronto (2017: 28) has observed, people are self-preoccupied, and they act as self-interested rational economic actors (*homo economicus*), but they do not always act from this motivation; people are also caring, *homines curans* (caring people). The will to care and show concern for others is as real a psycho-socio-political phenomenon as competitive self-interest. However, care for others needs to be nurtured through education and social practice if it is to survive as a cultural phenomenon.

Research and teaching priorities that are driven by academic capitalism (Slaughter and Leslie, 2001; O'Hagan et al., 2019), and an educational system that undermines respect for care through implementing neoliberal managerialist practices (Lynch, 2010; Lynch et al., 2012), cannot enable or resource people to think with care, or to think how to create an egalitarian and caring society. To develop *care-centric* thinking there is a need to rethink the epistemology underpinning academic scholarship (Medina, 2013; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012), because how we come to know impacts on what we know, and what we do with what we know.

Creating knowledge is a relational practice (Harding, 1991), and how we do it impacts also on the known other. There is a need to move beyond the idea of science and research as a means of controlling nature (and other peoples), to the idea of science and scholarship as a site of learning through cooperation. This means working as equals with other scholars, with those who are experts-through-experience, with nature and with non-human animals, with a view to arriving at a mutual understanding, driven by concerns for social, species and environmental justice, and an ethic of care.

Speaking out about carelessness and affective equality is not easy, as, like women's experience of sexual intimidation, it lacks a name that is claimable and knowable (Fricker, 2007). Under neoliberalism the world of care provisioning remains 'divested of a place in language'. It is visually and discursively absent from public consciousness (Brown, 2015: 104–107), but this is not inevitable.

If an ethics of care and social, species and environmental justice is to develop, effective communication has to take place, ‘publics have to be formed and to become able to express themselves; and social sensibilities of openness have to be cultivated for those publics to be listened to and responded to properly’ (Medina, 2013: 9).¹⁴ For carers and those in need of care to be heard, providing political spaces, and education and resources for the development of care movements is essential. People need to be given the conceptual and analytical tools to think about and with the world differently, and to be enabled and resourced to organise around this thinking and knowing.

Just as we need to counter hate speech with education (Verma and Apple, 2020), so we need to educate people in cooperative caring ways to create a different world (Noddings, 1984; Lynch et al., 2007). It will not happen by accident. It has always surprised me that we expect young people leaving school and college to be anything other than self-interested and self-preoccupied. As a study I undertook over 30 years ago showed (*The Hidden Curriculum*; Lynch, 1989), throughout their schooling, students are highly rewarded for engaging successfully in individualised competitions for grades and ranks. They are punished, in status and recognition terms, if they do not play the self-entrepreneurial game.

An education that does not *educate about* love, care and solidarity or social justice, and/or that undermines respect for care, social justice and cooperation *in its daily practice* due to its intense individualised competitiveness at formative stages of life cannot enable or resource young people to think and act with care. Altruism does not ‘fall from the sky’ (Folbre, 1994: 250); it has to be learned and practised, reinforced culturally and politically, and economically resourced. Education, including cultural and political education in local communities, is central to the initiation of that process.

Notes

- 1 Pope Gregory VII played a key role in establishing and regulating cathedral schools to educate the clergy in canon law, logic, disputation and the sacraments: he issued a decree to regulate them in 1079. Over hundreds of years, cathedral schools transformed themselves into the first European universities.
- 2 Upper class women!
- 3 By which he meant women. Plato claimed women were not equal to men in intellectual terms.
- 4 *And all possess the various parts of the soul, but possess them in different ways; for the slave has not got the deliberative part at all, and the female has it, but without full authority, while the child has it, but in an undeveloped form.* Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1.
- 5 Gaining competitive advantage through science and technology is seen as the way to promote wealth (OECD, 1996); it is assumed that increased aggregate wealth increases human wellbeing with little attention given to ensuring the equal distribution of this wealth.
- 6 Though there are a small number of women in top management positions.
- 7 The human capital theory of education was originally developed by the economist Gary Becker (1964).
- 8 The Irish government is among the many to endorse this perspective in relation to higher education (Department of Education and Skills, 2011).

- 9 In the UK in 2013, middle-class students were three times more likely to attend élite universities than working-class students *with the same grades*, while the percentage of poor students in Cambridge dropped from 12.4 per cent in 2005 to 10.2 per cent in 2016 (Reay, 2018: 531). This pattern is not unique to the UK, in most European countries, and in the United States, the middle and upper classes are significantly over-represented in the most prestigious research-intensive universities even if the reasons for this over-representation are different from those in Cambridge (Shavit, 2007; Triventi, 2013).
- 10 Even if the history of admissions showed that elite universities have resisted this (Karabel, 2005).
- 11 While data on mature student entrants is recorded in Ireland, 2019/20 is the first year that the data on lone parents *per se* has been collected as part of the National survey on access to higher education. Data on other student carers is not compiled in any systematic way.
- 12 Kulp points out that her research did not include an analysis of mothers who dropped out of PhD programmes. Given this, it maybe that the successful few are not representative of all student-PhD mothers.
- 13 Although the great majority of students in the study were Irish, there was a minority who were from a range of other countries who are studying in Ireland, especially at postgraduate level.
- 14 There is a need for a resistance model rather than a consensus model of democracy (Medina, 2013) not least because consensus often leads to undue pressure or even coercion on dissenting minorities.

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3 Negotiating Embodied Aspirations

Exploring the Emotional Labour of Higher Education Persistence for Female Caregivers

Sarah O'Shea

Introduction

As the number of students attending university continues to increase in most countries, the percentage of female participants compared to males is similarly expanding. Globally, there are over 100 countries where women outnumber men in university enrolments (Martin, 2015). For example, across Europe, the majority of countries report that at least 55 per cent of tertiary graduates are women (UNECE, 2019). Within Australia, women's participation in higher education not only exceeds men's participation but is also growing. Between 2007 and 2020, women's representation in Australian universities moved from 57.6 per cent of the enrolled population to 58.7 per cent (Workplace Gender Equity Agency (WGEA), 2020). Alongside this increase in female participation is a significant growth, in many countries, in the numbers of older students who are returning to further studies. This is particularly the case in Australia where just over 40 per cent of students are over the age of 25 and so classified by universities as being 'mature aged' (Black and Laverty, 2018).

While the numbers and diversity of women attending university have multiplied, there is clear gender disparity and delineation in terms of the fields of study chosen and the resulting career or job focus (Bostock, 2014; International Labour Organization, 2018). Increased numbers of female students do not necessarily equate into increased equity between genders. For example, older female students are more likely to have additional caring responsibilities that may impact on their university studies. The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC, 2018) reports that women spend almost twice as much time in unpaid care work compared to men. The Commission reports on care work under three main categories, each of which has higher percentages of female carers and include (1) being a primary paid carer (68 per cent), (2) being an unpaid carer for children (70 per cent) and (3) being involved in unpaid caring for the elderly or those with a disability or health condition (58 per cent). This type of additional, hidden work has implications for the ways in which many female learners, who are also carers, engage in university and their experiences whilst enrolled (Stone and O'Shea, 2019, in press).

This chapter takes as its premise that the experiences of female learners, specifically those who are older, are fundamentally impacted by gender expectations

related to caring and care giving. Based on narrative biographical interviews conducted with 27 women, this chapter seeks to explore the more embodied lived nature of this university experience. This research is part of a larger study that explored how students who are the first in their families to attend university consider their persistence in this environment and the particular capitals and capabilities that underpinned or facilitated this persistence (O'Shea, 2017–2021). While the broader study explored the nature of persistence from the perspective of the combined student population, the focus in this chapter is on the stories of the women with caring responsibilities. The rationale for this choice is based upon the ways in which the female participants reflected upon university attendance in more affective¹ ways, using emotional terms and language to describe and define both their aspirations for higher education and their behaviours within this environment. Many of these behaviours and perspectives were inextricably bound up within broader relational contexts and the interview narratives contained multiple cross-references between family, aspirations and also persistence acts.

The chapter begins with a summary literature review that examines the act of participating in university before considering how higher education systems are implicitly gendered in nature. Following a description of the research study and its design, the chapter then focuses on the reflections of older female carers within the Australian university sector before concluding with implications and recommendations.

Literature Review

University Participation and Women

The reasons for attending university can be varied and diverse. For learners who are older and with caring roles within the household, the rationale for attendance can be embedded in their caring responsibilities. Wainwright and Marandet (2010) highlight how for the female participants in their study, the drive to return to education was largely dictated by a desire to be an 'inspirational figure' (p. 456) to children and in some cases to construct a 'gender identity that embraced education and choice' (p. 456). Whereas, for the working-class women in Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody's study (2001), the desire to participate in university was perceived as a possible move away from the family, a desire to change or transform subjectivity, with such perceptions engendering an 'emotional toll' on participants (Walkerdine et al., 2001, p. 142). Equally, this participation may be considered not as a decision that effects change upon a person but rather as an opportunity for an individual to 'be' whatever it is they wish to become, a place that 'people seek out not in order that they may become something else but because they are what they are' (Tawney, 1964, cited in Reay, 2013, p. 661).

For many older women, participating in university later in life is an unexpected educational trajectory, which may contradict or compete with normalised or anticipated social roles or activities. Prior research has indicated how this journey into and through university is a 'risky' one that is characterised by detours and also, deterrents (Acker, 1980; Hinton-Smith, 2009). Both universities and the homeplace

have been characterised as 'greedy institutions' (Coser, 1974) that 'make total claims on their members' (p. 4), with research indicating the manifold ways this 'greed' plays out for older women who are studying (Acker, 1980). This is difficult, often emotional work that retains a level of invisibility, requiring women to metaphorically appease these 'institutions', both of whom seem insatiable in their ongoing demands. As a result of this, Hinton-Smith in her study with lone parents argues that 'While studying created an avenue or hope for the future for many, it also generated a range of risks' (2009, p. 123). One of these risks is, of course, the risk of early departure from university. Within Australia, almost double the number of women leave university due to family and personal reasons (29.6 per cent) compared to their male counterparts (16.6 per cent) (ABS, 2018).

Whether a student is desiring to achieve a separate identity or provide a role model for those around her/him or even seeking to acquire a space to 'be', the decision to attend university is clearly a complex one. One example of the intricacy of this move is highlighted by Feree (1990), who argues that because 'housework' is perceived by some to evolve out of a woman's 'natural desire' to care for family, if these caring needs are not met due to academic endeavours, then 'guilt' may ensue (p. 876). Indeed, the deeply embedded nature of guilt for female university learners with caring responsibilities is also echoed by Britton and Baxter (1999) who discuss how the women in their research largely referred to their desire to attend university in terms of selfishness or guilt as opposed to a need for self-fulfilment or life goals. For Britton and Baxter such negotiation reflects a gender imbalance whereby if women 'prioritise' their own individual or personal needs, then this offers a 'challenge' to the dominant discourses around the positionality of women within the domestic sphere (p. 190). As Reay et al. (2002) further explain, many older learners may be managing a difficult 'balancing act between wanting to study, meeting domestic responsibilities and needing to earn money' (p. 10).

By focussing on the intricacies of student life, the complexities of actually managing study alongside many other competing responsibilities are revealed. Public and private spheres are considered as being inextricably interrelated, with such recognition revealing how 'being' a university student is a richly emotional and embodied experience (Danvers and Hinton-Smith, 2021; McDonald, 2021). The next section explores the nature of the student experience in more qualitative depth, with a particular focus on the gendered overtones of this return to education.

University as a Gendered Institution

Universities are not neutral institutions. Instead, these are complex organisations underpinned by taken-for-granted social norms and practices. Assumptions about who students are abound; largely based upon outdated and mythic perspectives (Brooks and O'Shea, 2021). For example, in 2003, Read et al. (2003) reflected upon the pervasive nature of the call for independence and self-reliance amongst student populations; nearly two decades later this expectation retains dominance across media representations, policy and also institutional expectations (Brooks and O'Shea, 2021). This is despite dramatic shifts in the numbers and diversity of the

students who attend higher education institutions. Assuming all learners are similarly independent or self-reliant simply negates the reality of most contemporary learners (Sykes, 2021) and suggests that now, more than ever, it is necessary to focus on more nuanced understandings of diverse student populations.

Previous research (e.g. Reay et al., 2010; Wainwright and Marandet, 2010) has identified the gender-laden nature of learning. In Reay et al.'s study with working-class women, who had returned to education, participants were more likely to feel 'anxiety' and 'self-doubt' which translated into a sense of not belonging in higher education settings. Equally, Wainwright and Marandet (2010) also highlight how 'adopting a new identity of learner in addition to the continued identity, role and responsibilities of parent can be challenging' (p. 458). Joan Acker (2012) refers to the concept of 'gendered substructure' as the somewhat invisible practices and processes that are implicit in all organisational life. These organisational aspects often rely upon assumptions concerning the 'roles' of women and men as well as social expectations around femininity and masculinity (Acker, 2012, p. 215). The concept of 'worker', for example, is a gendered one, largely based upon the ideal of a 'disembodied' individual uncompromised by external priorities that might impact on this role (Acker, 1990). Whilst Acker is referring to the workplace, this understanding can equally be applied to the university setting as well, where learners are largely constructed as independent 'customers in an educational market' (Leathwood, 2006, p. 615). Such constructions are inherently based upon a 'self' unfettered by responsibilities to others or the homeplace (p. 615), where each learner is considered in isolation rather than as a person embedded in complex relational networks. For women who are returning to university after a significant gap in learning and who are often carers for the family, this type of individualistic positionality may simply be unachievable.

The research detailed in this chapter considered how current university students considered their academic persistence, focussing on those individuals who had reached the final stages of their qualification. These women participated in interviews that explored the qualitative nature of persisting in sometimes difficult and challenging environments. The opportunity to reflect upon the nature of persistence highlighted the complexities of their movement through university and the ways in which this movement was negotiated in relation to existing demands and responsibilities in life.

However, importantly, while this chapter is applying a gender lens to the data, it does not assume a binary notion of gender where terms such as 'woman' or 'man' are all-encompassing or homogenous categories, recognising that any understanding of these terms is shaped by social norms, class and ethnicity. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) highlight the need to move beyond 'one dimensional' understanding of gender and hierarchy (p. 829) identifying how there is a plurality of masculinities > In a similar vein there is arguably a plurality of femininities, yet traditional notions of woman as carer continue to predominate (Acker, 1992). In short, established roles and identities tend towards 'normative models', which are generally 'too narrow to accommodate the diversity of women's experiences' (Acker, 1992, p. 566). Hence the data presented in this chapter provide only a snapshot of those women who identified themselves as being female carers and it is not

offered as a universal or common experience. The findings are temporally, geographically and contextually bounded, providing one contribution to the richly diverse tapestry of contemporary university experiences, rather than a definitive perspective.

The next section details the research design of the larger project before focusing on the responses received from those women with caring responsibilities who participated.

Research Design

The project detailed in this chapter was funded by the Australian Research Council (DP170100705) with data collection occurring during 2017 and involving nine public universities located in Australia. The main objective of this study was to explore how students who were the first in their family to attend university and also in the final stages of their degree considered their persistence within higher education. The foci included an investigation of how individuals maximised cultural and social resources to achieve their educational goals and objectives, as well as consideration of the various qualities or experiences the students themselves viewed as being impactful to their university experience. A total of 69 interviews and 309 surveys were conducted with students from across the nine Australian universities, the participants had all completed two or more years of undergraduate study; this chapter focuses on the interviews with female carers.

To foreground the lived university experience, the research adopted a narrative biographical approach (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Narrative enquiry highlights the situatedness of human action, and during interviews, participants were encouraged to reflect upon spheres of life through narrative devices such as plots and themes. The act of narrating also encourages individuals to make connections between lived experience and the often complex embodied meanings that underpin this experience (Polkinghorne, 1995). Both interviews and surveys used open questions to enable participants to story their journeys into and through the university environment. The richness of this data was further complemented by the diversity of participants who identified as being intersected by multiple cultural, economic and geographical backgrounds.

For this study, mature-age students were defined as those over the age of 25 years and the focus is on those who were caring for children, although other caring responsibilities (i.e. parents, grandparents) were also mentioned in responses. Table 3.1 provides brief details of these older female carers who participated in interviews as part of this study ($n = 27$) including family details, educational background and also sources of financial support whilst studying. Whilst not all female participants provided all this information, some electing not to respond, the demographic information still indicates the complexities of these women's lives. Most of the women who participated in this study had not followed a traditional school to university transition, instead completing alternative entry options including vocational or professional qualifications as well as enabling or alternative entry programmes. The pathways into university within Australia are manifold, and so both vocational and professional qualifications would have been assessed for equivalency

Table 3.1 Demographic Details of the 27 Female Carers Who Participated in the Australian Research Council Grant research (DP170100705)

<i>Name Age Range</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Ed Background (If Stated)</i>	<i>Financial Support</i>
Hannah 26–30 years	2	7, 3	N/S ^a	P/T work
Aleisha 31–40 years	3	13, 11, 6	Post-secondary certificate (VET or similar)	Partner/family
Bernadette 41–50 years	2	12, 14	N/S	Partner/family
Dyahn 21–25 years	2	N/S	Post-secondary certificate (VET or similar)	F/T work
Donna 31–40 years	2	7, 9	N/S	Partner/family
Erin 31–40 years	1	7	N/S	Sole parent/ welfare support
Helen 41–50 years	2	17, 20	N/S	F/T work
Heather 51+ years	3	18, 21, 22	N/S	Self
Ruth 51+ years	1	19	Year 10 (4th form)	Self
Isabel 26–30 years	2	11, 9	Year 10 (4th form)	Welfare support
Jennifer 26–30 years	1	1	'From a family of drop outers'	F/T work
Josie 41–50 years	2	8, 10	'I didn't actually graduate high school'	Self and scholarship
Labriesha 31–40 years	5	N/S	N/S	N/S
Zahlia 41–50 years	2	11, 7	N/S	Family
Lara 41–50 years	2	6, 9	N/S	Self/family
Merelyn 31–40 years	2	8, 13	N/S	F/T work
Michelle 51+ years	4	32, 34, 36, 38	N/S	Self/family
Marion 41–50 years	2	Teenagers	Year 12 equivalent	Family
Molly 31–40 years	2	12, 15	Entry via an enabling course	P/T work

(Continued)

Table 3.1 (Continued)

<i>Name</i> <i>Age Range</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Ed Background (If Stated)</i>	<i>Financial Support</i>
Miriam 51+ years	3	21, 15	N/S	Family
Mahalia 41–50 years	3	18, 7, 6	N/S	Welfare recipient
Nicole 41–50 years	1	9	N/S	F/T work
Pippa 31–40 years	2	13, 16	N/S	P/T work
Trish 41–50 years	2	11, 14	N/S	P/T work
Nerida 31–40 years	2	9, 13	N/S	P/T work
Valerie 41–50 years	3	18, 19, 20	N/S	P/T work
Wendy 31–40 years	3	11, 13, 16	Year 12 equivalent	F/T work

a N/S = not stated by the interview participant.

for entry to a degree programme. University entry can also be gained through a Special Tertiary Admissions Test, which is an aptitude test designed to provide equivalence for admission.

Across the 27 women, there was a total of 61 children and approximately 39 of these could be classed as dependents (under 18 years), with an approximate mean age of 10 years. Each of the participants was enrolled in an undergraduate degree but could be studying in a variety of modalities (online, face to face or blended) or in various patterns (full-/part-time; block). Whilst the fees for degrees can be deferred through an interest-free government loan (HECS), there is limited state financial support for day-to-day living expenses, so the women in this study supported themselves through a range of sources. Six participants were engaging in full-time work and a further six were working on a part-time basis; the remainder were in quite tenuous financial positions relying variously on social welfare, family support or were self-supporting. Degrees in Australia are costed at a subject or unit level, and the costs vary depending on the discipline; at the time of this study (2017), the total cost of a degree qualification could be anything from \$AUD18,000 to \$30,000. Hence, students do accrue significant debt whilst undertaking their university studies and these monies have to be paid back through the tax system once individuals reach a predetermined income threshold. Such financial risk has clear implications for retention and persistence; leaving university early can result in perpetuating a cycle of poverty for those who are already financially vulnerable, which, as Table 3.1 shows, many of these women were.

Interviews were all transcribed and data sets were de-identified. Once this was completed, two researchers independently engaged in a line-by-line inductive coding process on a selection of interviews. These emerging themes formed the

basis for collective discussion and reflection. The data was then imported into QSR NVivo, and all data were coded across these themes with some of the initial themes becoming redundant whilst others were further redefined and clarified. The overarching theoretical framing applied to this data analysis was a fusion of Sen's capabilities (1992) approach combined with understandings of Social Reproduction Theory (Bourdieu, 1986). Such a combination allowed the data to be opened up and considered in much broader terms in order to understand the detailed nuances of the lived experiences of the participants. The following section provides an overview of how these two framings were applied.

Theoretical Framing

This study broadly sought to unpack the nature and enactment of persistence within a higher education setting, encouraging learners to reflect on their journey into and through university. A key element of this understanding was to consider the more emotional (Ahmed, 2004) nature of this movement. Exploring this affective state can reveal how educational settings can both 'alienate and invite engagement and participation for diverse students' (Hook, 2016, p. 1). To assist in this, the research was informed by sociological perspectives (Bourdieu, 1986) but these were combined with philosophical perspectives on social justice (Nussbaum, 2006; Sen, 1992), thus providing more complete insight into how individuals actualise persistence within higher education institutions.

The capabilities approach assisted in foregrounding the relational and negotiated nature of university attendance. Essentially, this approach recognises how true equality and freedom relies on what each person is able to 'be' or 'do' in a setting or 'the freedoms [people] actually enjoy to choose the lives that they have reason to value' (Sen, 1992, p. 81). True equality of access to higher education thus needs to be accompanied by both the necessary 'process freedoms' and the required 'conversion factors' that support and enable everyone to achieve their valued or fertile functionings (Sen, 2002, pp. 86–94). The capability approach also recognises the role of the agency of individuals and the variable nature of context and personal circumstance. This is key to understanding not only the ways that older female carers manage their higher education participation, particularly how they may employ strategies that disrupt or redefine expected life course or trajectory, but equally how such additional and often difficult work is completed by this cohort.

Combining this approach with Bourdieu's Social Reproduction Theory enabled deep consideration of the role of culture in the enactment of life choices, including educational choice (Bowman, 2010). Bourdieu's work provided a means by which to deeply examine the social arrangements that individuals exist within, particularly the differential access to capitals and how this access can impact on individual outcomes. Bourdieu considers various forms of capital that include economic capital as well as social, cultural and symbolic capital, with access to these dependent on interactions occurring within various fields. The social world is thus recognised as being more complex than simply being based upon economic wealth, instead considered as a multifaceted interplay between various forms of capital that determine the ways 'social groups acquire status and indulge in practices of domination and exclusion' (Prieur et al., 2008, p. 46).

The data presented in this chapter then foregrounds the actual 'conditions of choice' available to these older female carers as well as the various negotiations and hidden injustices experienced whilst persisting in their studies. This dual focus highlights both the lived experiences of these women and the actual flourishings available to them, which further impacted on their success.

Findings

The findings from this study are outlined under three key themes, as follows:

- Emotional underpinnings of university attendance
- Hidden work and negotiations
- Enacting success and persistence

Quotations and references from the interviews are presented with pseudonyms and summary biographical data (see Table 3.1). This section will be followed by a discussion which draws together the themes in the data in order to consider broader implications.

Emotional Underpinnings of University Attendance

As previously mentioned, this was a diverse group of participants who had multiple competing demands that had to be managed alongside their university studies. However, regardless of the complexities of engaging in these studies, overwhelmingly this educational endeavour was regarded in positive ways. This positivity was often expressed in terms of 'finding a passion'. Indeed the concept of passion was something that inspired the women both to commence university studies and to persist at their studies, despite hardships or complications. Like Mahalia (41–50 years, 3 children) who explained how attending university was on 'a bucket list. I'd always wanted to but just never felt that I was smart enough when I left high school' and Molly who succinctly explained how she 'started the degree just out of passion basically' (31–40 years, 2 children).

Such emotionality also informed the desire to pursue studies despite the difficulties and the hurdles that had to be overcome. Jennifer explained how sometimes she needed 'to convince myself every now and again of the reasons why I chose to go to university' remembering that she did not do it 'just for a piece of paper' instead; having never completed high school, it was a desire to achieve something 'bigger':

I didn't actually graduate high school so for me, it's kind of that opportunity to have that piece of paper and that celebration that I achieved something big, or bigger than what I have already achieved.

(Jennifer, 26–30 years, 1 child)

Repeatedly in interviews, attending university was described in terms of providing an emotional outlet, a conduit for a desire or passion that had previously been unfulfilled or overlooked:

we've been poor for a while now ...[but] ... I've found a passion and what's got me through those things is knowing that I'm working towards something I love...When you're all alone at 10:00pm – sometimes it's a bit hard ... so I'll shed my few tears and I'll get myself together, have a cuppa and go to bed.

(Josie, 41–50 years, 2 children)

What these and other reflections indicated was how this participation was far more than simply about increasing volume of knowledge but was rather wrapped up in the embodied nature of lived experience. Equally, some women referred to traumatic experiences in earlier life likening their attendance at university to a type of rescue, like Zhalia (41–50 years, 2 children) who considered university as providing her reason to 'be': 'My mum was raped and that's how I was conceived so having a reason to be here has been very important and I've not found it until now'. Even when this lived experience was difficult, it could be considered as a positive force in the educational decision-making process. For example, Michelle had chosen to study social work as a result of her painful childhood that had included abandonment, abuse and also ill-health, but the emotions provoked by this trauma equally provided the impetus to engage in further studies:

When I chose to do Social Work, I felt, 'No, I want to do this for me, one because I want to understand myself, I want to understand my world, I want to understand other people' and Social Work's given me that ... I'm really excited by that because it's given so much richness and value to what I've been through.

(Michelle, 51+ years, 4 children)

The language of these female carers was clearly representative of the affective nature of this participation, references to passion, love, desire and even grief abounded in interviews. While returning to education later in life undoubtedly influenced these sentiments, it was also their experiences as carers that informed this decision to enrol. Yet despite the growing number of older females attending university, this more affective side of participation remains somewhat sidelined or silenced. Foregrounding the diversity of rationales for attending university offers alternatives to perspectives that are focussed only on meritocratic understanding of university and those related to knowledge gains. These women's reflections indicate the diversity of reasons behind such decisions and the ways in which such rationales informed persistence in this environment. The next section explores how this university attendance actually played out within the family and particularly within the homeplace.

Hidden Work and Negotiations

A number of the women described how life before university had taken an expected or more traditional pathway, generally involving leaving school and working before marriage and children. For Zahlia (41–50 years, 2 children) and Pippa (31–40 years,

2 children) this trajectory was not necessarily unwelcomed but rather it failed to fulfil them in the long-term; Zahlia explained that while she was 'very ambitious' it was her husband who was 'happy for me to stay home with the children'. Whereas Pippa was initially 'quite happy to just be the housewife' but then as she 'grew older, I wanted a bit more out of life'. Both of these accounts provide insights into how the opportunities and expectations available to these female carers remained largely gendered in nature.

There were multiple expectations placed upon these women, most needed to integrate their lives as carers and also as university students in seamless ways. The responsibility of juggling family and study was obviously complex requiring creative time management skills and also discipline. However, what was less palpable were the feelings of guilt and inadequacy that sustaining multiple roles had on these women. There was a clear emotional toll to undertaking educational pursuits as a carer; often this was a heavy load carried by the participants. Erin (31–40 years, 1 child) reflected how she 'was getting burned out' as she attempted to 'juggle being a mum and trying to juggle being a daughter and a student and having time for me'. Social and gendered expectations were common themes in the data as the women considered the pressure to perform not only as successful students but also, as competent and acceptable parents, with clear repercussions when this performance was deemed inadequate or poor:

During uni, when my son got sick, I remember once my dad – who's very supportive of me now – but he said, 'Oh, you know, maybe you should give this uni thing a miss and concentrate on your family' and I really felt that, like maybe I was doing the wrong thing.

(Aleisha, 31–40 years, 3 children)

I can't be that mum that was there for every performance and every first day and things and that was hard and I struggled with that.

(Josie, 41–50 years, 2 children)

While acknowledging that university study is universally demanding and stressful, of note in these female carers' accounts is the additional and unacknowledged pressures many were contending with. Helen (41–50 years, 2 children) described how when her husband lost his job, she became the 'sole breadwinner' for the family, juggling this with studies. Whilst difficult, it was not the combination of studying and working that she noted but rather the difficulty of combining this with the expectations of caring:

last year my husband didn't work ... so I became the primary breadwinner again of the family and that was quite difficult to try and juggle and at that point, I was trying to get my degree done so I was studying full-time online and working full-time plus, you know, all the other things you have to do as a mum, cleaning the house and mum's taxi jobs and all those kinds of things.

(Helen)

In order to manage the additional, hidden work of caring some of the participants elected to 'let go' of elements of the caring role, like Josie who explained: 'As a mum I'd learned to cook and the house was beautiful and everything. Now, I struggle to do my sausages and mash' (Josie, 41–50 years, 2 children). Others, such as Lara, struggled with the repercussions of managing study around family: 'The only thing I find, there's a lot of guilt attached to it because I do a lot – my kids get a lot less attention' (Lara, 41–50 years, 2 children). Whilst Molly (31–40 years, 2 children) described how she had deliberately concealed her full-time enrolment load from her family in order to placate her children:

I did lose myself one semester a bit when I did three subjects and it was my kids saying, 'What's going on because we can't do this' and so I promised I wouldn't do any more than two, so this semester I had to be quiet about it. Yeah, kept it a bit of a secret.

(Molly)

The rationale for including these examples is not to suggest that these are universal themes but rather to highlight the diversity and complexity of negotiations that these female carers undertook whilst studying. Whilst each had the opportunity to attend university, there were many additional and hidden constraints that impacted on their experience and, ultimately, their capacity to fulfil, what Sen (1992) would term 'fertile functionings'.

Enacting Success and Persistence

Despite such additional burdens, importantly these women did manage to continue in their studies and, at the time of these interviews, participants were all at the final stages of their degrees. Achieving success was often a result of determination and resolve, sometimes bound up in achieving a sense of self or agency denied previously due to caring roles or life circumstances. Aleisha (31–40 years, 3 children) explained how her attendance at university was defined as an opportunity to be 'other', a space to adopt an identity that was not relationally circumscribed:

For me, when I go to uni, I'm not mum, I'm not wife, I'm not child – I just get to be me when I'm there. That's what I really like about it.

Persistence was also deeply intertwined with biography, particularly difficult life circumstances: references to disrupted educational trajectories, personal tragedies or even forms of abuse featured in some of these narratives. Rather than being defeated by these events, women like Erin (31–40 years, 1 child) and Pippa (31–40 years, 2 children) used these experiences as a catalyst for persisting:

I got sick, I lost everything, I virtually hit ground zero and then I had... I didn't have to; I could have just sat there and just given up but I wanted to rebuild myself, I wanted to be a good role model for my kids.

(Pippa)

when you've been surrounded by your whole life in the face of sadness, grief, you know, the unknown – after seeing all those things play out, you just keep on going. And I think that's probably what I've brought to university myself and that's probably what's helped me a lot is that you just keep on going, you don't give up.

(Erin)

Equally important was how this resolve and determination was often attributed to the caring status of the women, and specifically being a 'role model' to children. Helen (41–50 years, 2 children) described herself as 'very driven' recognising that as an online student 'no-one's there kicking you up the backside'. However, this drive to succeed was not only an internal strength but also derived from her caring role as she explained:

being a role model for my kids too to say that, you know, 'It's never too late to study', as well as saying, 'Guys, you need to do it earlier. You've seen me struggle sometimes with no sleep and all this kind of stuff so try and think about doing it before the family' kind of thing.

(Helen)

Out of these accounts and others, the theme of 'resilient biographies' emerged, where the reflections of the women indicated an ability to keep going based largely on their current circumstances and also a priori experiences in life. Of the 27 interviews, 13 of the women recounted deeply traumatic events that had occurred and explicitly linked surviving these experiences to their capacity to persist at university. For Heather (51+ years, 3 children), experiences of emotional abuse had provided her with an insight that 'I have amazing strength' which was then applied to her studies. Equally, Josie (41–50 years, 2 children) reflected how at moments when she considered dropping out 'it's kind of those "If it doesn't kill you it does make you really stronger" and you say "Well, I coped with that so I can cope", you know?'

What these and other reflections indicated was how attending and persisting at university was embedded within the lives and caring roles of these women. This determination to keep going might relate to their role as carer or be derived from the hardships that a difficult life had presented: 'Marriage breakdown and life reflection increased my determination to become the nurse I wanted to be' (Josie, 41–50 years, 2 children). Attending university was also described in emotional ways, with many hidden negotiations and complexities required. The final section of the chapter discusses the implications of such insights and considers how this understanding can be applied to understandings of persistence for female learners moving forward.

Discussion

Persisting for these learners was undoubtedly an emotional act; this could be wrapped up in resistance or a refusal to accept what seems to be a predefined destiny. For some this was an act of rebellion, a deliberate move to thwart a future that was traditionally gendered in nature. This ability to move forward despite

obdurate difficulties has been defined as a capital or cultural strength, referred to as 'aspirational' capital and recognised as an ability to 'maintain hope and dreams for the future' despite 'real and perceived obstacles' (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Yosso (2005) regards aspirational capital as a source of strength that enables people to dream of possibilities which may seem to be beyond the confines of their current life. For some of the women in this study, such dreams were articulated in terms of a 'passion' for learning, and it was locating their academic pursuits within these passionate or embodied realms that provided a strong impetus to both commence studies and to keep going. Just as Lehmann (2009) described how the young people in his study drew upon their working-class backgrounds to 'construct uniquely working-class moral advantages' (p. 631), arguably the women in this study drew both upon their experiences as carers and also those they cared for as resources to assist their forward movement in academia.

Identities like worker and student rely upon abstraction. These concepts are disembodied ones that fail to acknowledge that both roles are 'deeply gendered and bodied' (Acker, 1990, p. 150). In recognising the more emotive nature of engaging with university, the difficulties of participation for some cohorts become much clearer. In the current neoliberal climate, it is the learner who is responsible for both their adaptation to and success within the university environment. However, in individualising the act of participating in HE, this becomes a solitary endeavour (Stone and O'Shea, 2012), reliant on individual learners rather than being a shared or collective undertaking. Such individualisation has been described as essentially a masculinist discourse characterised by specific forms of 'knowing' and also 'knowledge' (Belenky et al., 1997). This type of characterisation essentially removes learning from the 'passionate' realms instead engendering a sense of detachment (Leathwood, 2006, p. 629). Despite the apparent importance of emotion, there is little research that focuses on the emotionality of education as Kenway and Youdell (2011) explain 'emotion is not formally part of education' (p. 132). Instead educational discourses largely favour rationality. The need to unpack such emotional overtures is also expounded by Christie et al. (2008), who argue that further studies are needed to '...explore the emotional journeys that different students make as they encounter different learning environments' (p. 579).

Drawing on the work of Bourdieu, Reay (2004) extends the concept of capitals to the emotional sphere explaining that while Bourdieu did not consider emotions directly, there are references to how 'practical and symbolic work' requires or necessitates 'devotion, generosity and solidarity', an emotionally embodied work that frequently falls to women to perform (Reay, 2004, p. 57). Reay (2004) points out that Bourdieu's cultural capital is essentially a relational capital that while inter-linked with economic, social and symbolic capital is both constituted and shaped by and through the family. Whilst Reay is focusing on the role played by women in their children's education and the demanding nature of this 'labour', it is the emotional undertones of this work that are noteworthy, as she explains:

women engage in emotional labour far more than most men, taking responsibility for maintaining the emotional aspects of family relationships, responding to others' emotional states and also acting to alleviate distress.

(p. 59)

As the narratives in this study point to, for these older female carers, juggling university and family life was a difficult and complex undertaking, requiring hidden work similar to the 'emotional labour' of Reay's parents. However, equally, the drive and resilience required to enact success in this higher education environment could also be positively impacted by the act of caring. As a number of the women explained, being a carer did not necessarily only restrict or impede academic success but, equally, could provide the necessary emotional building blocks to enact success. Recognising and harnessing the resources needed when combining caring and learning can assist in revisioning the nature of persistence, and also ensure that institutional policy and practice are formulated to better recognise the capitals and cultural strengths of caring. Rather than continue to disavow the personal or the embodied nature of university participation, what is clear is the need to more clearly situate educational aspiration as a 'sentient and emotive process' (Hart, 2016, p. 327) that draws upon the life experiences of a more diverse range of student cohorts.

One way forward is to consider how dominant narratives of university attendance can be rewritten to better represent the experiences of women, particular those who are carers. Rather than relying on the rhetoric of higher education participation as solely a means for professional advancement or recognition, there is a need to recognise alternative worldviews and rationales for participation. For the women in this study, educational aspirations were variously conceived, including the need to provide a 'role model' to others, to achieve a sense of personal agency or simply, to carve out a space to 'be'. By continuing to elide these alternative perspectives, these actors essentially remain silenced, existing on the fringes of educational participation rather than as key and important players. Whilst these female carers all had the capability to negotiate and, indeed, survive university, their choices within this environment will continue to remain constrained and limited until the deeply affective nature of this undertaking is foregrounded and celebrated.

Note

- 1 The term 'affective' is being used to convey the more 'nebulous' (Barnwell, 2018) ways that higher education participation was conceived and conveyed by these women.

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4 **Belonging, Space and the Marginalisation of University Childcare**

Genine Hook

Australian higher education has embedded policies and practices of widening participation since the mid-1970s which has supported the huge demand and participation by mature-age students who are also parents. A critical institutional mechanism that enabled this widening of participation by student-parents is childcare (Moreau, 2014). For many student carers, the availability and capacity of childcare was essential for them to participate in university study. However, childcare for student carers is not straightforward and is often experienced as an institutional gesture rather than comprehensively embedded into the everyday operations of university life.

An illustration of this limited gesturing by university institutions in Australia is the invisibility of childcare centres on campus. They tend to be on the edges, on the outer, which shapes the time and spaces student carers engage with. When childcare centres are on the margins of large university campuses, time to transfer between university sites increases and arguably time for student carers is at a premium. Time is critical to how student carers can engage with higher education spaces, childcare can cost more money for extended use and the energy used by student carers is increased through the additional time it takes to drop off, traverse through and access on-campus spaces. I argue that placing childcare on the geographic margins of university campuses reflects the limited institutional capacity for increasing participation and that only 'some' students are carers, rather than centring care for all people that engage with higher education. Rather than its intended outcome of opening up engagement for student carers, childcare centres can also be understood as constraining participation. The spatial limitations of on-campus childcare within higher education spaces demonstrate that universities are largely constituted as 'child-free' (Hook, 2016b) shaping the possibilities of student carers for engagement, belonging and success.

The Australian University Context

The Australian University context is strongly shaped by the 2008 Bradley Review into Higher Education in Australia. This review had a stated aim of 20 per cent of university students to come from low socio-economic backgrounds. This 20 per cent target remains unmet, although university student numbers from low socio-economic backgrounds are increasing. In 2019, students from low socio-economic

backgrounds constitute 17.6 per cent of the broader student cohort (Department of Education & Skills, 2019). The Bradley Review's aim to increase student diversity reflects broader concerns in the widening participation agenda in Australia that has sought to redress the ongoing under-representation of diverse social groups in universities (Hook, 2016a). The Australian discourse and intent for widening participation in higher education are

connected to longer histories over struggles for the right to higher education, to concerns for greater fairness in society, and to ensuring that higher education is more equitable and inclusive. It is also shaped by the growing diversification of student constituencies that have resulted from higher education expansion over the later decades of the twentieth century.

(Burke, 2016, p. 1)

In Australia, the numbers of mature-age students have grown by 25 per cent (2006–2011) and the average age of an Australian student is now 26 years and 11 months, and in 2019 women comprised 55.6 per cent of the total university population (Department of Education and Skills, 2019). From 2011 to 2016 there were an extra 90,000 students above the age of 25 enrolled at university, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. This increase in mature-age students in Australian universities is supported by online access and an institutional acknowledgement of the benefits of lived experience for student success and lifelong learning, with a broad acceptance of the career benefits of further education. Collectively Australia's 39 universities have an enrolment of more than 1.4 million students; 28.3 per cent are studying part-time. Australia does not collect data on how many university students are parents; however, the numbers of mature-age women students who study part-time indicate that large numbers of Australian university students are also parents. This chapter explores the experiences of students who are parents as they navigate on-campus spaces.

Australia has, or aspires towards, a higher education system that can enable all people to participate regardless of background (Rizvi and Lingard, 2011). It is understood as a social good and an individual 'positional good', wherein 'higher education is important because it confers significant individual benefits, in terms of personal development, lifelong income earning capacity, and career and social status' (Rizvi and Lingard, 2011, p. 6). Sara Ahmed (2006) argues that ongoing dialogue concerning equitable engagement with higher education is important to enable recognition of education 'as something that affects "everyone", at the same time, as it would show how some people more than others are given social and educational advantage' (p. 763). The passionate attachment to higher education and to being an educable subject has, to some extent, extended beyond only middle-class orientations and 'future-making' (Taylor, 2012, p. 66), as a purposeful movement towards financial security, career certainty and academic worthiness. This future-making is critical to the capacity-building of student parents from diverse backgrounds because higher education enables career progression, increased income earning and security, supporting the futures of student-parents themselves and their families.

Child-free Australian University Spaces

As universities welcome a diverse student cohort, a critical focus must also consider the extent to which university systems and spaces are ‘fit for purpose’ to ensure that universities understand and support the educational and wellbeing needs of all students. Following Moreau’s (2014) family-friendly university is problematic for student-parents because the traditional and conventional understanding of a university student does not ‘fit with the prevalent construction of the independent learner, child-free, mobile and fully available for their studies’ (p. 8).

This chapter explores the connections between university childcare spaces and the reproduction of educational inequities. Following Yuval-Davis’ (2011) ethics of care and the feminist political project of belonging, the links between childcare and educational engagement are critical. I contend that the spatial arrangements for childcare, situated on the outside margins of university campuses, are affectively interpreted as exclusionary and alienating by parent carers. The contested terrain of spaces in higher education is hierarchical. This is illustrated by the displacement of childcare, situated as unimportant, distant and invisible, reproducing intellectual autonomous expectations within the neoliberal academy. Kenway and Youdell (2011) remind us that education is largely considered ‘rational’ and separated from emotion, a ‘series of formal spaces the production and use of which is as “uncontaminated” by emotion as possible’ (p. 132). For student-parents, emotion is always and already embedded in care and therefore central to their education. Education and care must co-exist everyday and are never experienced as separate. Rather than experiencing education as an ‘uncontaminated’ attachment, student-parents experience a rich cross-contamination between education, care and emotion (*ibid.*). This purposeful and possibility-filled cross-contamination is not only unavoidable but is critical because it enables the participation in higher education for many student-parents. In this way education and care are co-produced in and constitutive of particular on-campus spaces, both where the care of children is and can be and also where it is forbidden and invisible. Without the co-production through the co-location of care and education within higher education spaces, university education risks becoming positioned as a choice to be made between parental care-work and academic-work. When combining both parental care-work and university study is largely rendered invisible and impossible, patriarchal and institutional limitations to equity and widening participation remain.

This connection between emotion and educational spaces that provide childcare draws on Ahmed’s understanding of emotions as ‘social; they form and are produced by “emotional economies”’ (Ahmed, 2004) which locate and produce subjects through exchanges between people and place. An examination of the emotional geographies of childcare on Australian university campuses is critical because it functions as a key mechanism of participation for student carers. If no childcare is available, and/or it is untenable, access to education is also in question. The readability of place and space for student carers on university campuses is critical to ways that students are able to engage safely with the emotional economy of university spaces and through which to learn a sense of belonging.

Narratives of Fatigue: My University Campus Initiation

In this section I share glimpses of my own experiences in traversing the confusing geography of my undergraduate university campus. This narrative follows the feminist position on alternative knowledge making to include 'expertise by experience' and personal stories to critique power and exclusions:

This involves deconstructing the individual-ness of personal experience, honouring and mapping the limits and possibilities of our differential abilities to develop resilience to harmful working conditions, and nurturing relationships in which we disrupt and transgress processes of subjectification by experimenting with alternative processes of becoming.

(Amsler and Motta, 2019, p. 86)

I began my first lecture during my first week of my undergraduate degree at Monash University, a large metropolitan university campus, many hours before I stepped into lecture theatre. Before the lecture I had to prepare myself and my four-year-old child for university life. To save time (and energy) I drove my car through the campus to reach the childcare centre because it was geographically so far away from the main campus. I stepped from my car into a puddle of water and mud because the carpark was on the fringes of the campus and had not been upgraded or included in the campus planning. The process of finding the childcare centre, dropping off my son and then hiking onto the main campus to begin the lecture was time-consuming and I was exhausted before I had even started the 'educational' part of my day. I was pushing against the tide of the everyday flow of this university campus, zigzagging across 3.6 kilometres of campus space in order to sit in one seat in one lecture room at a particular time, to be educated.

Ahmed's (2004) work in negotiating and co-creating the emotions of space reflects my sense of being out of place; I notice the mud and slush, the time ticking, being rushed, being alienated and exhausted. Following Ahmed's work I am experiencing 'the everyday way in which an individual body moves and negotiates its relationship to space' (Schmitz and Ahmed, 2014, p. 100). However, as a student-parent of a four-year-old child I am no longer an 'individual body'. I am always intrinsically linked to my young son. My individual body now must stretch or split within the university campus context, at one far-away corner my son remains and I walk and occupy the 'other' spaces of the campus. The mud and distance from the centre of the campus, to the library, student centre and my faculty buildings tell me that my childcare drop-off is not the usual beginning point for students because I am exhausted, having to work so hard just to get to the educational part of my campus traversing.

My initial reading of the campus tells me that this space is more clearly orientated to other bodies, because the 'disciplining of labour and labouring subjects in neoliberal institutions is also accomplished through the separation and hierarchisation of space' (Amsler and Motta, 2019, p. 90). The mud, distance and my exhaustion in traversing over and through this campus tell me that this campus and the

layout and built structures of my university education shape ‘how worlds are actually made to shelter some bodies and not others’ (Ahmed, 2014, p. 101).

The spatial arrangements of university campuses impact on student engagement and/or alienation; the ‘language of exclusion is, by and large, spatial; who’s in, who’s out, at the heart, on the margins’ (Gulson and Symes, 2007, p. 99). The spatial form of exclusion for student carers who are reliant on on-campus childcare is understood as a separation and a direction towards the periphery. The direction towards outer perimeters of university campuses and the exhaustion of finding and accessing the educational spaces become conditions of entry for many student-parents, as we must leave the baby/child away ‘over there’ before you come ‘in here’. Student-parents experience

Gendered segregations via the geography and architecture of built-places contribute to the subordination and spatialized social control of women, either by denying access to knowledge and activities crucial for the reproduction of power and privilege or by limiting mobility more generally within places defined as unsafe, physically threatening, or inappropriate.

(Gieryn, 2000, p. 474)

I argue that the spatial arrangements of on-campus childcare placed on the outskirts – out of sight and out of mind – can limit access, belonging and engagement to higher education for student-parents in Australia.

Educational spaces such as childcare centres are critical because education can be experienced as a liminal phase where one is ‘not a member of the group one previously belonged to, nor of the group one will belong to upon the completion of the next rite’ (Lahad, 2012, p. 177). This ambiguity and uncertainty of belonging and negotiation are linked with vulnerability, a sense of the unknown. Student carers have an intensified experience of the ‘un-known’; they manage the unknown of their child’s experience – who cares for them and how. Students who care are also outside the normative structures and understandings of university students that have typically been understood over time as young people who are unencumbered with caring responsibilities. This alienation from the norms and structures of universities contributes to the liminal nature of student carers’ education because they are outside the sequential and linear time of university study that is conventionally allocated to the young and unencumbered.

Universities tend to assume and/or privilege the unencumbered student subject and produce educational spaces shaped by boundaries and rules that suit the majority of students without caring commitments. Student carers are negotiating university campus spaces that are not designed for them, but their capacity as an educated subject is produced within these spaces. Youdell (2006) notes that

the meanings of these spaces may well be multiple, contested and shifting. This is across time and across those individuals or groups who occupy, pass through, avoid, boycott or are barred from these spaces and whose subjectivities are mediated by them.

(p. 58)

Restricting access to education spaces at university restricts access to knowledge and the privileges associated with higher education. Therefore spatial arrangements are critical to ways that higher education (re)produces gendered privilege and hierarchies because '[e]ducational systems create spaces which are reproductive of existing social relationships and dominant values in society' (Armstrong, 2003, p. 28). In keeping with the aims of widening participation and equitable access to higher education and the privileges and possibilities that this enables, it is critical that student carers are not excluded from university spaces.

Educational spaces are produced; they have boundaries and rules that attempt to normalise and regulate people. Often educational spatial boundaries are produced in clearly denoted language and at important entry points to critical buildings and places of learning. At the Monash University, Faculty of Education, a "safety notice" appeared, in the form of an Orange sticker on the main entry doors.

Safety Notice

Children in the Building Must Be under the Supervision of an Adult at All Times

The appearance of this 'safety notice' was seemingly random, appearing mid-semester. It was unclear what particular issue that relates to children the faculty management were trying to address with this notice. The language frames children as requiring a 'safety' notice and the wording of 'under' supervision can also be read as alienating and un-inviting. Performative acts can be 'linguistic *and* bodily' (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012, p. 73). The bodily act is to enter, or not to enter, the faculty building, and the linguistic act is a warning of safety for some perceived threat or adherence to an institutional rule.

These demarcations of university spaces are common on university campuses and contribute to the readability of university spaces as places where children do not belong:

health and safety policies often restrict the presence of children on campus (including sometimes forbidding their access to the library and to classrooms), ultimately reinforcing the view that academia should remain child-free.

(Moreau, 2014, p. 9)

The signage on the faculty entry door directs how children are legitimately able to occupy educational spaces on university campuses and may also mirror the long-held binary of parenting that is private and the wider-world which is regarded as public. I suggest that central to the notions of widening participation in higher education is the opening up of university spaces to previously restricted people and beyond wealthy, intergenerationally privileged young men. In this way, university spaces have become more egalitarian and open to the public, but distinctions in how this is experienced by diverse students, including student-parents, remain. Amsler and Motta (2019) remind us of this binary in operation in university spaces:

One of us always felt in the wrong place at the wrong time because, as a single parent, she often could not divide her time between strongly bounded 'public'

and ‘private’ spaces whose division was constructed as normal in academic life. She therefore ended up being in either an untimely way in university spaces with children, or in untimely absence from formal and informal academic activities when her children needed care elsewhere.

(pp. 88–89)

Disrupting this private and public binary of care-work is critical for student-parents who are more likely to be excluded from educational spaces if this binary of belonging is enacted. Mothering has been central to the conceptualising of ‘women’s work’ (Acker, 1990; Baker, 2012; Hays, 1996; Hochschild, 1979). Mothering as a ‘labour of love’ or a private home-based role has the potential to marginalise and disadvantage the people (mostly women) who do this work. ‘Mothers often face a choice of assimilation or denial in workplaces’ (Amsler and Motta, 2019, p. 85). Undervaluing parenting work and relying on women to do the majority of this work can result in limitations of inclusion and participation in social, political and economic experiences, including education.

Higher education has too often failed to understand and fully include student carers. Hinton-Smith’s (2012) work critiques the ‘legitimacy of the “Bachelor Boy” model of the ideal student, with its inherent assumption that full participation in the experience of being a university student requires an individual not to have conflicting responsibilities’ (Hinton-Smith, 2012, p. 84). The pressure to not have distractions or conflicting responsibilities of care-work creates ‘hegemonic space [which] also delegitimises subjects who are “other” to the presumed academic subject who either has no caring responsibilities or has these responsibilities taken care of by others’ (Amsler and Motta, 2019, p. 90).

Gender Norms: Care-full Students

The experiences of student-parents in higher education collide with gendered norms and expectations of parenting and the educated subject. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, women make up 70 per cent of primary unpaid care workers for children while 56.1 per cent of unpaid care workers who look after the elderly and or people with health issues and disabilities are women. The gendered norms embedded in university spaces and operations for student carers reflect the broader social understanding of caring work which is largely done by women. These gendered norms associated with parenting result in women-student-parents being more reliant on childcare in order to access higher education. Planning and availability of childcare are also critical for student-parents, so university decisions around timetabling and the cost and numbers of childcare places offered are also critical considerations. ‘Where the supply of childcare provision does not meet the needs of families, late timetabling can also leave student parents struggling to get appropriate childcare’ (Moreau, 2014, p. 9). For many families, for cultural reasons and inclusive restrictions for children with a disability, childcare may not be a safe or appropriate option.

Butler’s (2005) theory of performativity opens up a destabilisation of gendered norms through critiquing the repetitive acts that attempt to regulate how a subject

is constituted. The theory of gender performativity presupposes that norms are acting on us before we have a chance to act at all, and that when we do act, we reinforce the norms that act upon us, perhaps in new or unexpected ways, but still in relation to norms that 'precede us and exceed us' (Butler, 2009, p. xi). One of the critical ways gender categories are stabilised is through gendered heteronormative constructions of motherhood and fatherhood. This stabilising of parental gender norms re-inscribes historically designated binaries of mothering and fathering with the majority of care-work assigned to mothers. Women are mostly (re)produced as mothers, and this remains a largely stable gendered category across contexts, including higher education. Repetition of mothering norms is productive; it normalises and regulates the category of 'mother'; who is able to mother, how they are able to mother and in what conditions they are able to do so. This has ethical and feminist implications for how 'mothers' are able to engage and operate within the social institution of higher education. Parental acts produce particular academic subjects and maintaining a child-free university space conforms to prevailing academic expectations.

Student-parents navigate often conflicting and shifting contexts of university and home study spaces to support their participation in higher education. For many student-parents, home space was allocated to parenting and family which meant that their ability to study at home was limited. This effectively means that for some student-parents the preferred space to study was within university spaces, in spite of and sometimes precisely because they were understood as child-free zones, they found quiet on-campus spaces to study without immediate care-work responsibilities. This demand for study space and time on campus adds to the demand and importance of on campus childcare for student-parents, to meet the educational and spatial needs of some student-parents. In this way, university spaces have the potential to (re)produce gendered subjectivities, particularly in relation to student-parents when university spaces are constituted as child-free.

In research concerning negotiations of work and family in higher education, Wolf-Wendel and Ward (2003) argue that the gendered expectations of family obligations impact on academic lives in particular ways. 'The clockwork of this career is distinctly male. That is, it is built upon men's normative paths and assumes freedom from competing responsibilities, such as family, that generally affect women more than men' (Wolf-Wendel and Ward, 2003, p. 113).

Amsler and Motta (2019) discuss the construction of normative paths in higher education as illustrated through the juggling of student-parent's responsibilities of care and study which opens up possibilities but also remains contested.

We are mindful that women's presence in this establishment is a hard-won, fragile and relatively recent historical accomplishment ... yet struggles to open the academy to people whose lives do not conform to hegemonic models of the bourgeois, entrepreneurial white, male scholar are ongoing.

(p. 84)

The exclusions and possibilities of higher education are also highly gendered. The 'gendering of space and place both reflects and has effects back on the ways in

which gender is constructed' (Massey, 1994, p. 186). The gendered norms of university spaces is critical to both the readability of space and supports a sense of belonging, and also that childcare spaces on university campuses largely support and enable the education of women.

In her book *Space Invaders*, Puwar (2004) provides a framework to examine how spaces for some people can become 'subtle forms of exclusion' and the experiences of 'non-universal bodies' which exist 'as anomalies in places where they are not the normative figure of authority, [and] their capabilities are viewed suspiciously' (p. 59). Students who are also parents tend to be anomalies at Australian universities and often become highly visible when their children accompany them on campus because children tend to be a rarity on university campuses. These experiences illustrate how negotiations of 'visibility help us to understand the nuanced dynamics of subtle forms of exclusion as well as the basis of differentiated inclusion' (Puwar, 2004, p. 58). Placing restrictions and demarcations on children in university spaces similarly acts on the care givers of children and is therefore performatively gendered. Restrictions on children in libraries, lecture theatres and other learning spaces can act as a constraint for many student carers, particularly when childcare is unavailable or is prohibitively expensive. Universities have policies and unwritten practices that regulate the spaces, times and ways children can be on-campus. Laurel Richardson (1997) reminds us that '[p]olicing is always about bodies, though, isn't it? It's not just about ideas, but about people' (p. 148). I suggest that child-free university spaces is a particular policing of bodies who are attached to caring work, which shapes how gender is reinscribed over time within this context.

The 'child-free' university norm increased the pressure on student-parents to utilise childcare options that are away from the main campus which effectively limits the time and space children are on university campuses. When universities are constructed as child-free zones it tends to reinscribe academic cultures whereby '[b]eing a mother in HE seems so negatively received that women teachers [and students] have sometimes tried to "pass" as childfree' (Quinn, 2003, p. 67). The childless character of university spaces is often read by student carers as a conflict between their studies and parenting work, and it is this conflict which mediates their sense of belonging and legitimacy within academic spaces.

Regulating university student-parents is detailed in the work of Quinn (2003), who found that universities understood that some students also had children 'but a separation was clearly expected between them and the learning environment' (p. 113). Cella's (2012) essay in the collected work *Academic Motherhood in a Post-second wave Context* discusses the child-free attitude that she argues permeates her academic experiences, 'don't bring your children to school, to conferences, avoid telling stories about them at parties' (p. 264). Rachel Brooks (2012) notes that 'female student-parents continue to experience considerable pressure to downplay their "student" identity while at home and to retain their role as main caregiver irrespective of the demands of their university course' (p. 444).

In their analysis of academic work and family balance, Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2004) noted that the 'professoriate presumes a singleness of purpose that parenthood does not always allow' (Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2004, p. 237). Mason and Ekman (2007) describe a 'no children allowed' (p. 15) rule in relation to women in

PhD programmes in the United States. Christopher and Kolers (2012) argue similarly that the 'everyday functioning of the department takes on a childless character' (p. 304). Adhering to the 'childless character' of university spaces is problematic for many student-parents including during school holidays, when a child is unwell and during the ongoing and troubled pandemic times through lockdowns and restrictions of movement and access.

The childless institutional culture is negotiated through risk and choice for many student-parents. These negotiations are discussed by Springer, Parker and Leviten-Reid (2009) in their research on graduate student-mothers in the United States.

Student mothers experience awkward pauses rendered by pregnant bodies on campus, struggle to navigate strollers in classrooms, and search to find clear and discreet places to feed their babies ... there are constant reminders in the social and physical environment of the university that graduate student parents and their children do not truly belong.

(p. 439)

Amy Hudock (2008) recounts her experiences of completing a PhD in *Mama PhD: Women Write about Motherhood and Academic Life*. She describes how she mediates her parenting and PhD: 'at the university I will put on my game face and perform childlessness as best I can' (p. 65). Many student-parents 'perform childlessness', by not discussing our children, by leaving them with friends and family when we need to access university campus spaces and strictly managing their access and behaviour when we cannot avoid bringing our children with us onto campus. The burden of performing childlessness within university spaces, I argue, cites and repeats widely held views of appropriate use of academic spaces, established as child-free. I argue that this 'child-free' discourse reiterates and reinforces that rationality of universities as intellectual spaces in which children do not belong. This, by extension, shifts the sense of belonging or being 'at home' in university spaces for student carers.

In Closing

University spaces are reinscribed as child-free in both subtle and obvious ways, by placing childcare centres on the outside margins of campuses, signage and rules that exclude children and by requiring student-parents to negotiate time and place differently to other students. This creates the conditions that student-parents are able (or not) to participate and thrive in higher education. University childcare spaces and the negotiation of belonging for student-parents are made possible through 'zigzagging interconnections' (Braidotti, 2011, p. 17) between space, gendered parental norms and the rules of engagement universities mandate. Negotiating university spaces often tell us that our parental care-full lives are not a good fit for higher education. As student-parents '[o]ur presence as bodies and selves has the potential to reveal the tacit operations of power that order the dynamics of inclusion, exclusion, (mis)recognition and denial in the institution' (Amsler and Motta,

2019, p. 93). These interconnections with self and education are necessarily about power, knowledge and desire: they are affective and productive.

My focus on on-campus university childcare spaces adds to a detailed understanding of how student-parents orientate towards further study and create a sense of belonging in higher education and therefore has implications for widening participation and equity in higher education. This analysis of university spaces that are isolated and on the margins of university spaces also contributes to the field of gender and higher education through theorising parental care-work often read as motherhood. Examining parenting as a performative of gendered norms within the context of childcare and higher education spaces enables an understanding of institutional structures that can exclude and alienate student carers and restrict the widening participation and equity aims of higher education.

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5 **Anything but ‘carelessness’**

Employed student-mothers’ experiences of low-status vocational higher education

Paul Smith

Introduction

Higher education students provide care in a variety of contexts as they attempt to balance study and other obligations that they hold beyond the academy. Research into those identifying as carers has offered insightful findings into their experiences as students (Brooks, 2015; Moreau and Kerner, 2015; Torres et al., 2020). This chapter draws upon a Bourdieusian framework to explore the narratives that a group of student-mothers offered as they described their experiences of studying for a foundation degree which aimed to upskill and retain school-based teaching assistants (TAs). Foundation degrees are UK sub-degree qualifications which focus upon providing a mixture of academic and work-based learning to enhance the skills of occupational groups who sit outside of the professions. These qualifications are similar to associate sub-degrees which have been developed in Hong Kong and the United States. Eight group and 12 individual interviews enabled 47 learners to tell their stories. All were studying at a university in the North of England.

Before my research findings are explored, this chapter initially examines the nature of the teaching assistant workforce and the emergence of UK-based foundation degrees. Following this analysis, a review is offered of key studies that have examined the experiences of student-mothers. Next the theoretical and methodological framework of the research is discussed in some detail. I then consider the narratives that my interviewees offered about why they had decided to undertake foundation degree study and the complex caring situations that they had subsequently been required to navigate.

The development, expansion and gendered nature of the teaching assistant workforce

Across the globe there has been a growth in associate professional roles (Edmond, 2010), particularly in occupations where caring is a primary function. These workers occupy an intermediate position between those groups of non-manual workers who have secured professional status and those who have not. Associate professionals often carry out workplace tasks that were once the preserve of their professional counterparts but are now deemed not to be a productive use of professional time.

The expansion of this occupational stratum has led to the emergence of nursing associates, health care assistants, associate carers and physician associates. Colley and Guéry (2015) have maintained that the policy discourses which surround these occupational developments legitimise the transfer of work from critical public sector professionals to less well-paid, powerless and consequently more compliant workforces. Scholars have explained how these developments are linked to the increasing influence that neoliberalism has had on welfare policy and practices. Internationally, the marketisation and commodification of caring services have appreciably shifted the norms, experiences and regulation of 'associate roles' such as those performed by teaching assistants (Cortes Santiago et al., 2017).

Several associate roles have specifically emerged in UK schools, including learning mentors, cover supervisors, parent support workers, educational support assistants and learning coaches. These roles also exist in the education systems in many other countries. In the UK, teaching assistants have been the group of associate professionals that has grown the most dramatically. In 2018, 265,167 teaching assistants were employed in English schools (DfE, 2020). In common with many low-paid caring occupations, women who are non-graduates are far more likely to be employed as teaching assistants than men with a similar educational profile (Gunter and Rayner, 2005). Mothers with dependent children below the age of 16 also disproportionately undertake such roles (Barkham, 2008). These workers do not merely assist qualified teachers with the facilitation of learning tasks; they also provide a range of other types of personalised care to children and young people.

In the UK, teaching assistants are involved in a broad range of nurturing and caring activities (Dunne et al., 2008). They offer children extensive emotional support, promote emotional literacy and enhance mental health (Calvert, 2009). Research into the deployment of teaching assistants in 30 English schools has also documented that they frequently assist children who have mobility difficulties, provide personal care (such as toileting), supervise medical equipment and oversee the administration of medications (Skipp and Hopwood, 2019). They also support pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (Groom and Rose, 2005). Caregiving duties are, however, often underplayed and somewhat invisible in much of the literature that explores the work of teaching assistants.

The development of foundation degrees and the challenges of student-motherhood

As associate professionals have grown in number, higher education institutions in the UK have validated foundation degrees, which intend to develop the skills of this group of workers (Smith, 2017). Foundation degrees which focus upon childcare occupations provide accessible routes to higher education for mature female students on low incomes (Craig, 2009) and unsurprisingly those aimed at teaching assistants recruit large numbers of student-mothers (Leach, 2009). These vocationally related sub-degrees emphasise the importance of work-based learning and involve studying for 240-degree-level credits at levels four and five

which is the first two years of full-time undergraduate study in the UK. In UK universities, the increasing prevalence of these qualifications reflects neoliberal higher education reforms which have promoted education as ‘a product’ that is to be purchased (Naidoo and Williams, 2015) and measured in terms of potential future economic return.

Scholars have illustrated how the dual status of being a higher education student and mother can produce substantial pressures (Brooks, 2013; Shafi and Rose, 2014). The challenges of juggling study alongside other obligations have been extensively documented in a variety of empirical studies (Arskey et al., 1994; Merrill, 2015). Research has revealed that such students regularly employ an array of coping strategies, including studying at home only after childcare responsibilities have been dispatched and through accessing localised provision (Brooks, 2013). Surprisingly, however, most of this research does not provide detailed analysis of the impact of caring obligations and often they are a mere contextualising variable (Moreau and Kerner, 2015).

Yet a small number of scholars have nevertheless documented how gender, class and inequitable discourses of care can impact upon student-mothers’ experiences of time, space and study. These studies highlight the constraints that this positioning can have upon the experiences of students; however, they also stress that space exists for resistance and counter discourses can be productively constructed as part of this process (Moreau and Kerner, 2015; Torres et al., 2020). It is, however, the case that caring obligations and involvement in paid employment place substantial constraints on the time that student-mothers can dedicate to their studies. They are routinely time-poor due to caring for children, spouses, extended families and friends. This outcome is partially a consequence of ‘Gendered expectations that place a different value on “men’s time” and “women’s time”, with women’s time being given up to the demands and needs of others while men’s time is regarded as more valuable and productive’ (Stone and O’Shea, 2013, p. 100). Elsewhere in this book, Lynch explains how the marketisation of higher education has assumed care-free students and academic staff. This emphasis discriminates against those who have substantial caring obligations, particularly women.

For student-mothers higher education can be an extremely emotional journey and guilt often occurs when they believe that their studies have reduced the amount of time that they have to provide childcare (Brooks, 2015). Caring for older and ill parents can also generate physical and emotional challenges (Wilkinson and Wilkinson, 2020). Comparative research into student-mothers in Denmark and the UK has highlighted how discriminatory ideologies of care, when combined with economic disadvantage connected to class position, can further amplify the pressures that low-income student-mothers face. Brooks (2013) found that Danish student-mothers were advantaged by good access to state-funded childcare and societal narratives which promoted partner ‘turn-taking’. In contrast, UK student-mothers felt compelled to display an undiluted commitment to the care of their children and in these circumstances, those without the means to access private sector childcare provision were particularly disadvantaged.

Theoretical frame and the study's methodology

Theoretical frame

The research and analysis that is discussed in the second part of this chapter draws upon the work of the eminent French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Although it has been noted that Bourdieu's work offers little analysis of how gender relations play out in societies (Adkins, 2004), feminist writers have suggested that his theoretical concepts can be productively drawn upon to explore the experiences of mature female learners (Colley, 2007; Skeggs, 1997). Reading this work alongside my own data, I thought that a Bourdieusian framework presented a productive lens through which to analyse student-mothers' experiences of vocationally-related education. Such analysis is also largely absent in academic literature in this area.

At the centre of Bourdieu's (1984, 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) thinking is the notion that the transfer of economic, cultural and social 'capital' between individuals and social groups leads to the replication of existing power relationships and inequitable divisions. In 'social games', capitals are viewed as being retained, lost and transferred as differentials in power are played out in a variety of interconnected social spaces or what Bourdieu (1986) terms 'fields'. Importantly, fields are deemed to encompass 'rules for how to play, stakes or forms of value (i.e., capital), and strategies for playing the game' (Bathmaker, 2015, p. 66). Bourdieu uses the term 'illusio' to describe the situation where individuals have a strong interest in and commitment to a game's continuation. I was interested in whether the experiences of student-mothers who were engaged in vocationally-related higher education were in some way shaped by capital and its accumulation.

Cultural capital encompasses knowledge, capacities and crucially skills that the hegemony of the dominant classes defines as being of higher value and worthy of social progression. In *Forms of Capital*, Bourdieu (1986) claims that cultural capital can be embodied, institutionalised or objectified in nature. Embodied cultural capital is comprised of 'ways of being and feeling, such as language, tastes, patterns of communication and behaviour' (Saraceno, 2014, p. 4). In its objectified state, cultural capital is represented in physical possessions and cultural artefacts such as artwork, text and music. When cultural capital is authenticated and officially recognised by dominant societal institutions, Bourdieu categorises it as institutionalised. I wondered whether this process had influenced the decision-making of those who took part in my study.

In addition to his initial three forms of capital, Bourdieu also offered the notion of symbolic capital, which he defined as: 'the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 291). Cultural capital can originate from what Bourdieu (1986) terms habitus which is 'a system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53). Habitus encompasses more than predispositions and perceptions or the 'feel for the game'; it also incorporates the expression of 'durable' habits and other social practices (Reay, 2004). Again, a Bourdieusian framework seemed appropriate to my research, as I wished to unpack the dispositions, routines (habits) and behaviour (practices) that student-mothers experience.

Habitus has the capacity to change as positions and conflicts within fields are modified. It is also analogous to fields in that it has the potential to shift as individuals engage in social interactions (Reay, 2004), and Bourdieu therefore does not, as one critic has suggested (Jenkins, 1982), offer a purely determinist view. Nevertheless, scholars should be mindful of Bourdieu's weaknesses, including the relative lack of empirical data that is offered to support his theorisations and an extremely limited analysis of gender relations.

Methodology

The findings that are reviewed in the second part of this chapter were gained as part of a long-term research project that was undertaken between 2008 and 2015. Therefore, the arguments that are presented in this chapter should be read in this context, and it is acknowledged that changes to policy and practice may have modified TAs' outlooks beyond this timeframe. My research explored the experiences of a group of mature (over 21 years of age) foundation degree students at one post-1992 university in the North of England. These UK higher education institutions were granted university status under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. Prior to this date they were generally polytechnics and teacher training colleges which placed less emphasis upon research activity than those institutions which held university status before 1992. The narratives of 56 foundation degree students were captured via semi-structured interviewing. In the first stage of data collection, eight group interviews were conducted with 44 first- and second-year students (38 were mothers). Twelve additional students were then questioned in individual interviews to explore emerging themes. Nine of these interviewees were student-mothers. Interview questions focused upon three issues: (1) workplace roles, (2) reasons for deciding to undertake foundation degree study and (3) experiences of being a student. Initially the focus of the research was not student-motherhood, but the high number of interviewees who fell into this category led to a focus upon student-parenthood. Interviews were thematically analysed with codes generated to identify core themes and throughout the research process, the British Educational Research Association's (2011) ethical guidelines were adhered to.

Volunteer interviewees were sought via an email to first- and second-year students. As part of this process, purposive sampling (Richie et al., 2014) was employed, and although the sample seemed to be largely reflective of the social characteristics of the foundation degree cohorts, the research did not aim to be fully representative of any wider populations. Only two of those sampled did not self-identify as white British (one Nigerian and one Polish). Over a third had children below the age of 11.

Berger (2015) has outlined how 'Reflexivity is commonly viewed as the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of a researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome' (p. 220). It involves moving the focus of analysis from research participants to the researcher's own situatedness, history and conception of the self. Reflexivity and ethical practice therefore require a critique of the researcher self and an exploration of the positionality between

researchers and those that they investigate (Brooks et al., 2014). Researcher positioning is influenced by a range of personal characteristics including, but not exclusively: workplace status, gender, age grouping, ethnicity, nationality, life experiences, sexuality, political leanings, general belief systems, biases, linguistic tradition, ideological commitments and theoretical stances (Berger, 2015). Reflection on positioning therefore requires an intersectional gaze that explores various aspects of a researcher's identity, positionality and power.

The research discussed in this chapter was undertaken when I was employed at the university where the student interviewees were engaged as learners. I lectured on and was Head of Programme for the foundation degree that the students were studying for. This aspect of my positionality created several issues that required a high degree of reflexivity. The power differentials that flowed from the status of my occupational role were considered throughout the research process. Of particular concern were the ethical dilemmas and potential sources of bias that flowed from the positionalities of myself to those who were the focus of my research. There was a potential that interviewee responses would in some way be constrained by or posited in specific ways related to my position as a tutor and Head of Programme. To mitigate against these effects, several distinct strategies were employed, including a request for participants to be open and honest about their feelings with an accompanying reassurance that their thoughts would be purely used for research purposes. The voluntary nature of participation was also stressed and anonymity assured.

I enlisted small groups of learners to express their views on emergent codes and themes. Peer debriefing was also employed, which Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe as the process where the researcher exposes 'oneself to a disinterested peer[s] in a manner paralleling an analytical session' (p. 30). Two strategies were employed to engage in this type of scrutiny: asking workplace colleagues to comment on emerging findings and through gaining feedback by presenting my initial theorisations at an international education conference. It was hoped that these processes would expose biases, including those which may have specifically resulted from my position as a male researcher studying student-mothers. Gender difference has the potential to constrain trust, rapport, the nature of the accounts offered and interpretation. Whether gender matching between interviewees and interviewers is desirable has been the subject of much discussion amongst scholars (Thwaites, 2017). It has been suggested that 'matched' gendered identity markers within the social situation of an interview can produce more open, authentic and in-depth discussions (Oakley, 1981). Collins (2009) also notes that gendered experiences and social positioning inform how dialogue is made sense of. Women being interviewed by women can offer an enhanced collective understanding when mutual assumptions occur. Phoenix (2010), however, maintains that such a stance is potentially reductionist in that social positionings are complex and intersectionality is an important consideration. For instance, in my own research I felt that as an ex-teaching assistant, a previous mature student and a person who had a working-class upbringing I had some positional benefits that encouraged open and expansive accounts from interviewees. Yet, I was acutely aware of the potential that gender relations can have on the research process and regularly reflected upon this

potential limitation. The next part of this chapter discusses the accounts that my interviewees provided and the insights that a Bourdieusian analysis can offer.

Limited access to capital and an attempt to move away from lower-status care work

Virtually all the student-mothers claimed that their decision to return to study had been significantly influenced by a desire to achieve career-switching; however, they continued to aspire to future employment where the performance of care work would be a key feature. They just wished to achieve greater and more equitable rewards for their paid work. Most teaching assistants are paid at or just above the UK National Living Wage. Pro rata salaries are also the norm where teaching assistants are paid on a term-time-only basis. Those who provided personal care to pupils with disabilities were intensely vociferous in their condemnation of the limited returns teaching assistants receive and they expressed high levels of anger and frustration. In Bourdieu's terms, they had rejected the teaching assistant game, they no longer had a feel for it and their *illusio* had been undermined by a lack of economic, social and symbolic capital. They, however, continued to express a strong commitment to the care game and its associated social habits and practices:

Don't get me wrong, I love being a TA [*teaching assistant*]. We make a real difference to the children. I work with a little boy with Autism and I can see him making real progress. I am happy, proud of myself really and I know his mum appreciates what I do. It's exhausting but absolutely really satisfactory. The pay is the big problem for me. I want better for me and my own kids. I love it, just we aren't appreciated as we should be.

(Dawn, individual interview response)

In students' accounts, constrained levels of social capital within the field of the workplace were also a strong feature:

My classroom teacher has been really good at including me in things like planning. She's really supportive, but I never see my head. We aren't really actually involved in whole school discussions and things like staff development. Our SLT [*School Leadership Team*] don't take much notice of us or get involved with us until they have something to tell us to do. There's not a connection or thoughts about what we can do, might do in school as such.

(Kirsten, individual interview response)

At the start of their studies, most of the students aspired to become qualified schoolteachers and a much smaller number wished to secure future employment as counsellors or social workers. All the students aspired to employment in caring occupations that offered a greater range of rewards than those they were receiving as teaching assistants. Again, there was a continuing commitment to a *habitus* which prioritised the importance of care and the value of

being a carer. There was no evidence of a fracturing of *illusio* in this respect. Whilst they thought that society generally undervalued teachers, those aspiring to this role believed that it would still enable them to access enhanced economic and symbolic capital. They were acutely aware of the lack of capital accumulation opportunities that being a teaching assistant presented them with. For the majority enhanced access to a range of capitals was defined as beneficial not only to themselves but also to their dependent offspring and was therefore framed as a caring act:

I hope in five years' time I will be a fully qualified class teacher inspiring many children to learn. As you know, I am planning lessons now and teaching regularly so I look forward to being paid more and also having the respect that qualified teachers get.

(Dawn, individual interview response)

Somewhat counterintuitively, most of the interviewees' narratives indicated that enrolling on a foundation degree programme, which aimed to improve them as teaching assistants, was a form of resistance to their present occupational positioning and was not a continuing commitment to it. In doing so there was a rejection of the policy assumptions which frequently presume that many vocational learners have career ambitions that are limited to their current roles. There was also an awareness of the institutionalised capital that being a graduate offered and the advantages it provided to enter new fields where additional resources can be competed for.

Navigating the emotions of study, discourses of care and identity work

Many of the interviewees indicated that while their entry into higher education had principally been driven by a desire for career-change, they were also on an emotional journey to repair aspects of their personal self which had been undermined by earlier interactions with formal education:

I left school as soon as I could because I didn't have a very good experience of school life and I did go to college and subsequently life before children I did have a relatively good job and erm but I just wanted to do it for me. I knew I was bright even if all the teachers were telling me I was a lazy idle loafer and I sort of took it on board. But it is years later as you can probably realise and so I'm just doing it for me to prove that I can, prove something. I didn't want to continually feel stupid.

(Jayne, group interview response)

For many, there was a belief that studying for a higher education qualification (institutionalised cultural capital) would improve their sense of self-worth in addition to furthering their career prospects. Indeed, most of the students' narratives, in common with what others have found (Shafi and Rose, 2014), suggested that their

self-concept had been heightened as they had gained confidence in their academic abilities and experienced positive reactions when they informed others that they were studying for a degree. It should, however, be acknowledged that symbolic capital via participation in higher education is stratified by the reputation of the university attended and course studied (Loveday, 2015). Many of the students recognised this situation and were reluctant to tell others that they were studying for a foundation degree. Such omission was linked to the lack of prestige afforded to these programmes.

Studying and the ways that it was described were therefore an intentional act of emotional self-care. However most of the student-mothers indicated that they had also experienced negative emotions due to a sense that their studies could be regarded as selfish and uncaring. Anxiety about providing appropriate levels of support to dependent offspring had led some to delay the start of their studies.

I'm the sort of person that likes to be busy naturally, but I didn't want to over commit myself and put my family at risk and fail at it. I didn't understand what would be involved in university and I was worried about that really. As a mum, I waited until they were the right age and needed less support.

(Christina, individual interview response)

Frequently, initial decisions about course choice were similarly informed by a need to maintain care responsibilities and routines. When asked about why they had decided to study for a foundation degree related to their employment, interviewees regularly stressed its restricted contact hours, twilight attendance, localised delivery, comfortableness with the course's content and a lack of classes in the school holidays. Yet, there was a common narrative that despite committing to courses with these features, they had still encountered substantial difficulties as they had tried to balance caring obligations, workplace duties and studentship in a series of interconnected social fields. As they had tried to navigate the complexities of this situation, feelings of stress, guilt and sadness were regularly encountered. In common with their workplace roles, their domestic caring responsibilities were structured by gender- and class-based inequalities connected to a lack of access to suitable childcare support. This situation has been exacerbated as a mixed economy of welfare provision has been encouraged by a variety of neoliberal governments, which has led to a decline in high-quality and affordable state-provided childcare.

When explicitly asked whether student-fathers were likely to have a similar experience to student-mothers, this proposition was generally rejected. In some instances, this was illustrated with reference to male partners that they had assisted through study. Support had involved removing male partners from caring and domestic tasks. One consequence of this assistance was that it had allowed their partners to have space and time for study. This difference reflects the unequal gender relations of patriarchal societies where student-fathers are in a position to have time for their own personal development. In contrast, many student-mothers described their attempts to 'ringfence' time for intensive caring which was mainly

used to provide support to dependent children and partners. They had endeavoured to fit study around these commitments, but this had been difficult to achieve and had engendered negative emotions and feelings:

I feel frustrated and sometimes guilty about it, but I expect them to understand as I'm doing this for the family. You don't always control things the way you should and they [*children*] lose out. It's regrettable. I can get quite emotional about it at times. I get down and sad about it really.

(Dawn, individual interview response)

Other researchers have similarly documented strong feelings of guilt amongst student-mothers and constructively have explained how these are linked to 'normative constructions of motherhood' which involve an expectation that mothers will provide the bulk of care work and domestic activity within the family (Moreau and Kerner, 2015). The desire to maintain a caring persona within the field of employment also produced emotive feelings for the student-mothers who took part in my study, especially as they attempted to complete work-based learning where colleagues were required to assess their practice, take part in interviews, provide reflections or document that tasks had been completed. Strong narratives of guilt accompanied discussions of undertaking learning within the workplace:

It's time and you feel so guilty asking them to give up their time because it is so precious. And erm it is a guilty thing. I always feel so horrible when I have to say please can I have a bit of time to go through it and they will go through it, but it's always snatched time.

(Petra, group interview response)

At times, guilt was also expressed about the reduced amount of time that they had to devote to caring for partners and friends. These accounts therefore illustrate the ways that student-mothers on vocationally-related programmes can experience significant emotional pressures, which have the potential to weaken the development of a positive sense of self. They underline that these students can encounter emotional dilemmas as they move between the interconnected fields (spaces) of higher education, the family and the workplace, whilst they try to preserve a valued sense of being a caring individual. The threat that study posed to a self-concept of being caring and the symbolic capital this potentially offered was a source of emotional distress. In their accounts of how they had attempted to manage this situation, the student-mothers often discussed how they had redefined their studies as a caring act.

Scholars have outlined how student-mothers navigate feelings of guilt through constructing narratives that intertwine studentship and 'good' mothering (Moreau and Kerner, 2015). Some of the vocational student-mothers who took part in my study also offered guilt-alleviating narratives that challenged dominant notions of what constitutes 'reputable' (Skeggs, 1997) motherly care. These accounts did not

though encompass a complete rejection of patriarchal notions of motherhood or fully reduce feelings of guilt:

I think it's about not seeing it as being something for yourself. It helps you justify it to yourself in some ways as being for your family and children.

(Liz, group interview response)

I didn't have you see [*positive educational role models*] as a child and for me that's a really important step for me to move my family on as well as for myself erm and that they see that I'm doing that and they see that I'll be able to do that if my mum's doing that. So, that's now become a big motivation for me and it helps. It helps in your mind knowing you are doing your best for them when you don't always have the time that they want.

(Christina's individual interview response)

Sarah O'Shea's contribution to this edited collection also offers additional insights into how student-mothers' participation in higher education is a deeply emotional act of gendered persistence, which can be regarded as a form of resistance to pre-determined destinies.

Some of the students also claimed that their studies had taken pressure off the teachers that they worked alongside as their enhanced knowledge base had allowed them to carry out additional tasks and work more autonomously. In key respects the recategorisation of what should count as legitimate (reputable) care can be viewed as a necessary act of self-care which enables a positive self-concept to flourish whilst additional capital is pursued. It can be a productive form of identity work (Snow and Anderson, 1987) where the communication of caring identity markers assists the avoidance of a spoilt self which is somewhat structured by gendered notion of care, femininity and symbolic capital. Yet this process can also be regarded as socially reproductive in that the inequitable hegemonic habitus of reputable femininity continues to structure caring identities, care practices, feelings of guilt, sadness and educational experiences.

Conclusion

Whilst there is a growing body of research which has documented the experiences of student-mothers, relatively few studies have focused upon the feelings and emotions of those who study for lower-status vocationally-related qualifications. This chapter has aimed to encourage further research into and enhance theorisation of caregiving, student-motherhood and emotive experiences. It also endeavours to shed light on the distinct as well as the shared emotional challenges that such learners can encounter when studying for vocationally related degrees. Moreover, the research that is discussed contributes to the literature that has drawn upon sociological analysis to understand the lived experiences of mature students.

Generally, student-mothers offered accounts which stressed a strong and continuing commitment to dispatching care to others and therefore the retention of a caring identity and the symbolic capital that being a carer can confer. They did,

however, reveal a powerful rejection of the levels of capital that they had received for performing their existing school-based caring roles and there was opposition and resistance to the notion that their present occupational location was their set destiny. From a Bourdieusian (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu Wacquant, 1992) perspective, the lack of appropriate access to a variety of forms of capital had led them to reject the inequities of being a teaching assistant and their *illusio* was partially fractured, at least in terms of playing the teaching assistant game. They recognised that the acquisition of a university-level qualification (institutionalised cultural capital) was likely to improve their chances of moving on from their existing occupational position.

Reflecting the findings of previous research (Brooks, 2013; Merrill, 2015), many of the student-mothers had found balancing study with prevailing normative expectations of motherhood extremely difficult. The pressure to perform established patterns of caring and related identities had produced emotional strains and organisational challenges. Many of those involved in the study further suggested that they had experienced negative emotions as they navigated fields outside the family, notably in the schools where they worked and in their social lives. Work-based learning was problematic in that it could potentially be defined as an uncaring activity and for similar reasons not having time for friends was also a concern. In response to these pressures and the threats that they posed to the caring self, there was evidence of identity management practices being employed. For example, there was an attempt to resist the hegemonic ideal of intensive mothering (Moreau and Kerner, 2015) through the development of narratives which categorised their studentship as 'good' parenting. They also redefined work-based learning as having long-term benefits for the teachers that they worked alongside and consequently redefined it as a caring act.

These gendered experiences are reflective of a *habitus* that promotes patriarchal and hegemonic femininity (Paechter, 2018) where care, caring and being a reputable female are entwined. Here femininity is conceptualised in a highly traditional and male way which stresses dominant notions of women as caregivers and aligns this form of femininity with morality. However, as Brooks (2015) illustrates, class-positioning and its accompanying identity markers intersect with gender to confer additional disadvantages for working-class student-mothers as they are unlikely to have sufficient economic capital to access formal childcare services. As part of this edited collection, Sallee et al.'s innovative exploration of student-mothers who experience food insecurity in the United States also exposes how poverty, class disadvantage and gender can combine to produce severe hardships. Equally, it should be noted that race, nationality and ethnicity also intersect with social class and gender to frame the experiences of student-mothers (see Cox and Pidgeon's contribution to this volume).

Further research in this area is therefore required to allow policy suggestions to be developed which are equitable. The need for such studies is considerable in an era where the requirements of student carers often only receive cursory discussion in national education and localised university policies (Moreau, 2016; Wainwright and Marandet, 2017). In this book, Hook's discussion of the spatial arrangements of childcare facilities on university campuses and their location on the peripheries of campuses sheds some light on the lack of consideration that higher education

planners pay to the inclusion of student-parents into the mainstream of university life. Regrettably, universities, as they have become more aligned with the values of neoliberalism, have propagated the notion of the 'carefree' student as a central marketing strategy and in doing so have disadvantaged female mature students who are anything but careless.

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6 ‘A Space for Me, but What about My Family?’

The Experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Student Carers in UK Higher Education

Christine Browne, Chelsea McDonagh, and Colin Clark

Introduction

The diverse and multifaceted experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students entering UK higher education have received increased attention in recent years (Clark, 2004; D’Arcy and Galloway, 2018; Mulcahy et al., 2017; Ryder, 2017). This empirical attention is overdue and begins to address the gaps in knowledge regarding how students from these backgrounds access higher education and experience their studies. What is less apparent is what happens *outside and away from* campus and classes. That is, what are the wider structural and cultural conditions that *enable* Traveller students to attend university in the first place and ensure that they can study effectively and are being supported to fulfil their potential? Similarly, what are the *barriers* to accessing higher education courses and outreach programmes? A key aspect to this discussion, we argue, concerns their off-campus experience of caring responsibilities. A recent study in Scotland (MECOPP, 2020) shows that a high number of younger Travellers have significant caring responsibilities, mainly for older relatives, younger siblings and their own children. This has a bearing on access to classes, as well as focused study time when at home, and the ability to complete their degree.

To fully understand this chapter there needs to be a basic understanding of who Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people are and how they experience life in the United Kingdom. Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers are often grouped under the acronym of ‘GRT’ and in the United Kingdom this refers to communities who have a historically nomadic existence with shared cultures and value systems (Clark and Greenfields, 2006), some with a legal ethnic status and some not. It is also important to note that nomadism is not the singular characteristic of their identities and Travellers are still ethnically Travellers even when living in flats or houses. It is also important to note that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people are not homogenous populations, and their experiences and values can and do differ vividly.

There is a wealth of data and research showing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have consistently had poor school-based educational experiences and attainment (The Traveller Movement, 2019), lower levels of life expectancy and poor health outcomes (Millan and Smith, 2019) and higher levels of involvement with the criminal justice system (James et al., 2019). They are communities who

both historically and in the present day, find their freedoms being curtailed through government policies from the Egyptians Act, 1530 to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, 2021 which aims to curtail nomadic freedoms even further (Smith, 2021). In the spotlight of the media, they have been portrayed as everything from vagabonds and thieves to the crass voyeurism of the ‘My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding’ Series (Belfiore, 2020). A YouGov survey revealed that public perceptions are low, and many people would not be happy to have them as a family member or colleague, whilst 91 per cent of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people had experienced discrimination due to their ethnicity (The Traveller Movement, 2017). The evidence paints a bleak picture of what it is like to engage in society for many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. In the following section, we identify how this plays out in education and results in the slow trickle of young people progressing to higher education.

In terms of positionality, it is important to note that the three authors of this chapter all come from Traveller backgrounds and have been through university: two of the authors are younger, female junior scholars, whilst the other author is an older male professor. We explore, against the national backdrop of poor educational experiences and outcomes, a series of progressions into higher education and the navigation of caring responsibilities. We critically reflect in this chapter on our own experiences of negotiating the (often painful) boundaries, barriers and cultures of higher education whilst undertaking caring duties for older relatives, siblings, and our own children, as well as the emotional impact of moving away from family and the ingrained caring responsibility culture that some Travellers may carry with them. In this sense, the chapter is informed by both existing research studies and literature as well as key auto-ethnographic insights and reflections (Collins and Gallinat, 2010). Using these academic and ‘insider’ perspectives, we analyse what this means for higher education institutions who are serious about increasing the number of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students progressing and succeeding in their institutions.

The Context of Caring for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities in the UK

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have some of the highest rates of unpaid caring responsibilities of all groups (Hardy, 2018). Despite this, it is barely mentioned in the research literature surrounding educational attainment and higher education access. The focus of research into poor educational outcomes tends to focus on institutional failings or biological essentialist notions of ‘cultural limitations’. Rarely, if ever, is consideration paid to how the intricate structures of these families facilitate increased caring responsibilities.

Caring is such an ingrained part of day-to-day Gypsy, Roma and Traveller family life that it almost goes unnamed and unspoken. Rather, it is taken for granted and just ‘done’. Households are more likely to be multigenerational, including the elderly and the young. It is a break from the white British ‘nuclear family’ that has become the norm and accounts for two-thirds of family living situations, tending towards the ‘it takes a village...’ (African Proverb) mindset common in other areas

of the world, and indeed different ethnicities in the UK living in multigenerational households (GOV.UK, 2011). Much of this care work is undocumented and comes down to internal and extended familial responsibility and expectations. At different stages, this could have different repercussions for students, especially if there is not an understanding of these wider responsibilities.

Caring Responsibilities and Higher Education

There is a growing academic and third-sector literature on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students entering higher education (see D'Arcy and Galloway, 2018; Forster and Gallagher, 2020; Morley et al., 2000; Mulcahy et al., 2017). It indicates that there are at least three key aspects that need to be properly considered to understand experiences of higher education for these students: access, take-up and delivery. Access refers to the process of gaining entry to institutions. It includes, but is not limited to, outreach work and addressing conditions for access (attainment, fee status and application support). Take-up refers to how students engage once the barriers have been overcome (acceptance of places, attendance, attrition). Delivery refers to what universities teach and how they teach it. There is emerging literature on how these areas affect Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students, and the following section examines these areas through the lens of caring.

Access to Higher Education

For many young people, widening participation programmes are a positive tool in increasing awareness about higher education (Robinson and Salvestrini, 2020). In England, universities charging fees of £9,250 per year are required to have an access and participation plan, and carry out widening participation activities. The overarching aim is to increase the intake of underrepresented students. There is no central prescription of how this should occur, and much is left to the individual university to choose who, how and when they target. This means that the efforts by some universities are greater than others, due in part to funding allocation, resources and the university agenda. Only a minority of universities in the UK provide structured support for pre-entry students that are Gypsy, Roma or Traveller or young carers, let alone both. The percentage of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students accessing higher education is very low, with an estimate of 3–4 per cent in comparison to 43 per cent from across the general population (Mulcahy et al., 2017; Office for Students, 2020). This resonates with the access of young carers more generally with it being thought that only 3–6 per cent of young carers are entering (Kettell, 2020). Evidently the barriers to access reach across structural, material, individual and cultural levels (Clark, 2004).

Outreach work often starts in secondary school or even later. Yet educators know how important the formative years are (Donnelly et al., 2019), and if students are continually behind their peers, those that reach higher education are the few and the privileged. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students are more likely to miss parts of secondary school, for many reasons, including caring responsibilities (Derrington and Kendall, 2008) – this includes missing enrichment activities

which can include career development and widening participation activities (Donnelly et al., 2019). If students do not have access to this important networking and social capital information at school, and are not exposed to it at home (Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students are less likely to have parents who finished formal education (Wilkin et al., 2009)), then they are at a stark disadvantage. The intersectionality between Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students and caring means there is an opportunity to engage them in activities aimed at young carers. However, caring responsibilities are entrenched into some Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cultures, so that they see it as ‘normal’ to have caring responsibilities. This could mean that they do not ‘tick the box’ for caring responsibilities that could result in signposting them to opportunities that they are eligible for and could benefit from.

Take-Up of Higher Education

Widening participation programmes go a small way to address barriers facing some students but cannot reach every young person, and do not address the multiple, intersectional barriers.

There is research evidence to suggest that take-up is uneven and drop-out rates are high (Jarvis, 2016; Le Bas, 2014), as is the case for many disadvantaged students (Boliver et al., 2020). This reflects the experiences of young carers, in terms of their drop-out rates, and is an important reminder that efforts at widening access and participation do not simply end once students are ‘in the door’. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students are more likely to be the first generation to navigate university systems such as online application portals, student services and faculty communications. This can increase the likelihood of loneliness and abandonment that both Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students (Forster and Gallagher, 2020) and young carers (Kettell, 2020; NUS, 2013) have described feeling. If a student is both a Traveller and a young carer, not having these structures, or knowing how to access them, could compound these feelings. The academic journey needs to be followed closely for such students – and their wider families – and support offered across degree pathways to enable better take-up (Atherton, 2020).

Delivery of Higher Education

As well as the curriculum, delivery also includes not viewing family and caring as less important than a degree. For young carers this is harrowing enough, but for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, this coupled with ethnicity-based prejudice could lead to an increased feeling that university is not a space for them. The structure of degree programmes, particularly those with heavy contact and self-study hours, or lacking in flexibility of assignments, can be a considerable barrier to students with caring responsibilities. If they are part of a larger network of family carers this could cause tension between family members who do not understand the requirements of study at university level. It is imperative that lecturers understand that students have different responsibilities, and some do not have the privilege of attending every lecture or completing every assignment at a designated time. Being able to

recognise patterns in engagement and use an empathetic, flexible approach could make the difference between a student dropping out or succeeding.

Both Students and Carers, within Family Contexts – How University Is Experienced by Gypsies, Roma and Travellers

This next section is based on our individually written personal testimonies. We adopted a 'reflexive self' methodological approach, one that is both autobiographical and autoethnographic in format and style to convey what we have uniquely experienced (Okely and Callaway, 1992). Such an approach is common within social anthropology, and we have produced a text that critically self-reflects on our backgrounds, experiences and memories of caring and higher education. In doing this, we think about issues such as ethics, authenticity, shared knowledge and how (auto)biography is processed and understood (Collins and Gallinat, 2010). These sections are deliberately written in the first person to best convey the meaning and the message. We each come to this issue with our own unique experiences, backgrounds, and circumstances. We have allowed ourselves space to consider the diversity and differences between us, as much as the similarities based around ethnicity, class, age, dis/ability, gender and sexuality. We reflect on our experiences as both students and employees within, and outside of, higher education and how different types of caring roles have framed our respective lifecycles and transitions. Indeed, where we have come from, where we are now and where we are perhaps heading next are the three stages, or narratives, that we wish to examine. In doing so, we tease out some general points about higher education policy and practice and how colleges and universities respond, or do not respond, to the needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students and their families.

Chelsea

At the time of writing this, I have recently finished my master's degree and am coming to the tenth-year anniversary of my grandmothers' stroke, one that left her unable to walk or talk, and the wider family as her carers. Many country people (non-Travellers) are confused when I explain that we do not believe in the use of care homes, not when it is still possible for us to undertake these duties at home. These caring responsibilities have come with great sacrifice for everyone involved. When I first applied for university, the weight of these responsibilities, including for younger siblings and nieces – which is common in Traveller families – meant that I opted to stay at home and commute. I would attend lectures and classes in the day and fulfil caring responsibilities in the evenings and night, and as time went on it became unmanageable as I tried to balance university, work, placement and sport. At times I felt guilty about not fulfilling these responsibilities as much as I should have done. I have been able to push back on these caring responsibilities as other family members pick up the slack but this is not a privilege that everyone has.

These responsibilities, as well as others, have meant that university has often felt like a side project. I have felt this greatly during my masters which I split part time

over two years because I could not afford to do it in a single year. There are modules where I attended only a single lecture, and I would often scan the key readings as I stood outside the lecture door, or my friends would pass me their notes across the table for me to gain at least a surface-level understanding. Flexibility and understanding from many lecturers meant that I was still seen as a 'good' student, even if I did not always attend or do the additional tasks. But there were modules where mandatory participation marks meant that I lost out when I could not participate in the same way as my peers. How do you e-mail a lecturer you have only met once and explain that you are interested in the subject, and want to do well, but you do not have time to make it to the lectures or do all the readings? Sometimes you do not and just try your best on the assignment, even if their feedback reminds you that the range of responsibilities prevents you from reaching the heights you are capable of. The support of a handful of lecturers during my undergraduate and master's degrees have helped me in part to navigate this, particularly the support from those that extended beyond the topic and module. The hours spent discussing theory, life and the place I occupied at the intersection between two worlds have been more important than they could ever really know. It has reassured me that I was still a 'good' academic, even if I did not do all of the things that other students did. The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that universities are seemingly more understanding about the impact of outside responsibilities, and extenuating circumstances¹ have been more readily available, but where was this option and support when we carried that burden alone? Prior to the pandemic many universities did not reach out proactively and instead it was a rigid and formal process that required written evidence. The irony is that I have never ticked the caring box on the university form because no one told me I should. I was never made to feel as though the range of caring responsibilities I have are valid. My assumption was that to tick the carer box on that form meant that you are the sole carer, and not one of the collective carers.

The interconnectedness of Traveller families' lives means that the Eurocentric, nuclear family model does not reflect the reality of my family. I grew up next door to my grandparents and surrounded by aunts, uncles and cousins – a situation that continues to this day. This means that the responsibility for children spreads across the family, even when you did not bring them into this world – something that is not easily understood in a society that promotes individualism. For my non-Traveller peers, it was not common for them to have caring responsibilities that extended far beyond parents caring for their children, or children caring for their parent. It meant that the categories used to collect data on caring responsibilities were redundant and did not take into consideration my unique caring experiences as a Traveller student.

There was a time when I felt torn between two worlds with two different viewpoints, a broader society view where you put yourself first and a Traveller viewpoint where you put your family first – but why should we have to sacrifice our family to do well at university? Why is there not a space for us to do and have both? I have now completed my master's degree and whilst I do not want it to be the end of my academic journey, I cannot help but feel tired and exhausted. Many supportive academics ask me about my next steps but how do I explain that I am tired of

spinning plates that just feel like they keep falling? The structure of higher education means that those who do not have financial backing and do not have the luxury of being able to focus solely on academia find the possibility of a career within academia being pushed far beyond their reach.

Chrissie

Before I describe my time at university, it is important to know the context of my journey. I attended university at age 26, but how I interacted with the education system changed over the years and provides the lens of my university experience. As with many Travellers, I did not have the *gorger* (non-Traveller) myth of what a Gypsy or Traveller upbringing should look like. I was raised on a Traveller site until the start of primary school, which coincided with my parents' divorce. I moved into a house with my mum (my dad is a Traveller, my mum is not), and spent the weekends on sites or the roadside. To me this was normal but led to a compartmentalised life: I did not speak about living on a site to my housed friends or my week at school to my site friends. There was already subtle knowledge about the differences between the worlds and the need to keep them separate, and the loneliness that came with that.

The strongest memory that persists of my childhood and my families, both Traveller and not, is the work ethic and contributing to the household. The importance of work was always there, from going out calling with my dad, going with mum on her cleaning or caring rounds, or keeping the house clean. This is not to say I had an unhappy childhood, but these formative years created different thought processes than those of some other people my age. By secondary school I was more interested in work than education. Cleaning and household tasks were not a method of earning 'pocket money'; they were just part of being a family unit. By 16, my entire locus of success was based around working. This may be why it came as a shock to my family when I decided to go to university at 26 via an access course. For many years I had lamented about 'lazy students' needing to 'join the real world'. Two of my brothers had been to university, but it was not something that was spoken much about at home. All I knew was that they were 'away' and not there for the family. This led to feelings of bitterness that I have since transferred to myself.

My family has always been supportive, but throughout my degree I felt like, while excelling academically, I was failing at what I 'should' have achieved. All I could think of was that I should be married, should have children, should have a home to call mine. There were also regrets over family events that I missed. The first day of my degree was the day after my granddad's 90th birthday (a feat for anyone, let alone a Gypsy man) and there was a big celebration on my brother's land. Everyone was there except me. I missed an important family event to pick up an ID card and a few free pens from stalls trying to entice me to join the university experience. There were thousands of people on campus, but I'd never felt so alone.

Over the four years of my degree, my granddad's and other family members' health got worse, every call home included the dreaded question of 'how is...?' My brother, dad, step-mum, aunties and uncles carried the collective burden of caring,

a part of family life I was no longer involved in. My family never once suggested I should be there doing it as well, but I felt like I should have been. On the outside I looked like every other privileged white woman choosing to go to university (and most people on my course were privileged white women). On the inside I felt like I was unsuccessful for not working full time, a failure for not having a child, and guilt for not being there to share the caring responsibilities. Emotions that, when I tried to share with my personal tutor or other *gorgers*, were rebuffed as ‘you are still young, plenty of time for all of that’. I never felt like my lecturers were approachable or understanding. It was as though having a life outside of academia was not something that could be spoken about in the university building. These attitudes have made me question my career choices, as I feel like I have come from too different a direction than others.

Until I started connecting with other Traveller university students, I felt alone at university, but couldn’t tell my family because I wasn’t there for them either. University was an amazing opportunity not everyone gets, especially not in my family, and I did not want to seem ungrateful for it. I was privileged to go to university, but I will never get the time back to be there for my family. It doesn’t end when university ends either, my career is in a different city to where my family is, and I again must choose between ‘being there’ and ‘being here’. In many ways, it felt like the girl that kept her ‘site life’ and ‘school life’ separate almost 20 years previously.

Colin

My experiences of university life, in multiple roles, vary across an extended period, and they cover different kinds of family caring responsibilities. It is probably easiest to think about this in terms of defined periods of time, with some overlap.

1988–1992

Despite successive periods of interrupted learning and various school moves in the north-east coast of Scotland – all related to family employment opportunities – I was able to secure a place to study Applied Social Studies at Paisley College of Technology in 1988 with just a C grade in Higher English and BBB grades (as resits) in Higher Geography, History and Economics. Between the last two years of secondary school, over the summer, I worked as a labourer on a building site in Dundee, and this focused my mind to continuing education, with the full support of my Mum. I was the first person in my family to go to university and I had no idea what to expect. Of note, I now teach and hold a Chair, at the same institution that was the only one to accept me as an undergraduate student back in 1988 (now called the University of the West of Scotland). My undergraduate years in Paisley were not easy, largely due to bullying and a failure to grasp the expectations and demands of the curriculum. I also missed home. As a result of not settling, at the end of my second year, I managed to negotiate a transfer from to Dundee University. I’d had enough of shifting between these two worlds and wanted to be closer to my family so I could fulfil my caring roles and meet the expectations

placed on me. This was at a time when such 'transfers' between institutions during undergraduate study was not common – so I was nomadic even during my undergraduate years. This transition 'home' was successful, both academically and in terms of extended family life, and I managed to graduate with an Honours degree in Political Science and Social Policy. It was just before graduation that a lecturer at Dundee, Dr Richard Dunphy, suggested I should aim to continue my studies and apply for a PhD.

1992–1994

Thanks to the guidance and advice of Richard, I was able to apply for a PhD scholarship at Edinburgh University. At this point in time, I still did not fully know or appreciate what a PhD was (Richard had just said it was like 'a big essay'). I did not undertake an MSc degree, going straight from an exam-based undergraduate degree to a PhD. Looking back, I know I would not have dared to apply for or venture into postgraduate studies – or move to Edinburgh – without Richard's support. The influence that one person *who cares* can have should never be underestimated. The transition to Edinburgh was also not very easy, for reasons I will come on to discuss, although as I was still on the east coast of Scotland, I remained close to my family and could get home easily to help with caring duties and attending family events. However, Edinburgh felt a world away from my reality and lived experience, both the city and the University. It was here that the social class differences, much more than ethnic identity, really came into focus and my sheer lack of social, cultural and economic capital was made clear to me, both by fellow students and by some staff. However, thanks to a supervisor who I was able to trust and confide in, I was able to keep my studies (just about) going. I was also able to take on part-time employment in Edinburgh to contribute financially to the family pot.

1995–2013

The main period that is particularly relevant spans nearly 18 years. During this time, I found myself occupying multiple caring roles and identities, not least becoming a parent to four boys myself. I also started working full-time as a Lecturer in Social Policy at the University of Glasgow (1995–1996), and then other posts followed at Newcastle University (1996–2004) and Strathclyde University (2005–2013). The periods at Glasgow and Newcastle are important to note here as at both institutions I was playing a dizzying day-to-day mixture of multiple roles; I was, at one and the same time, a part-time PhD student (I would not submit my PhD until 2000), full-time Lecturer, partner and husband, parent, and member of a demanding extended family. Combining these roles was challenging, and not just in terms of finding the time, space and energy to try and fulfil them to the best of my ability, and to not let anyone down. Caring for small children, being a part-time student, and full-time Lecturer was almost impossible, and I nearly gave up on my PhD numerous times. Pressures at work, and health issues within the immediate and extended family, required that I adopt working practices that were ultimately damaging and unhealthy. A period of 'burnout', and struggles with work and mental

health, occurred between 2007 and 2008 and signalled a need for fundamental change. It was at this point the backdrop of care and caring was sharply brought home to me, as much as being a carer I was now the person *in need of* care from the extended family.

2013–2021

Since 2013, when I moved to a professor post at the University of the West of Scotland, the caring dynamics have changed a lot as small children have, of course, become young men. Indeed, three of my older children have now graduated from higher education themselves. They have done so through their own hard work and efforts, but also as second-generation entrants who have gained knowledge through my immediate experiences and working/practical knowledge of how universities operate. This form of social and cultural capital (and finances) is important to appreciate as many Traveller families do not possess it. This is one aspect, I think, that widening participation measures need to appreciate a lot more as well as working with the families of Traveller students and not just students themselves.

Analysis of the Three Autobiographies

What are some of the common themes and issues emerging from the three testimonies presented above regarding higher education and caring? There seems to be at least four main themes that require some further critical discussion. (1) the idea of being located in ‘two different worlds’, and the methods and caring strategies for trying to cope with this lived reality; (2) the social, cultural and financial capital required to stay in university, make progress and succeed whilst also caring for family; (3) the impact of caring on individual and wider family health and well-being, and making time for self-care; (4) the importance of being aware of support within and outside university for studying and caring duties. We will discuss each of the themes in a little more detail and try to best capture the experiences and realities that the narratives convey.

Living in ‘Two Different Worlds’

It is striking that all three testimonies discuss the lived reality of shifting between what feels like two very different worlds, a Traveller world (of caring, of home, of family, of work) and a university world (of studying, of social relationships, of time away from family, of thinking about ‘next steps’). From what is raised here, it is clear this split takes its physical, mental and emotional toll, just in terms of the ability to manage these tentative transitions and how occupying ‘two different worlds’ is often rendered possible (D’Arcy, 2010). However, it is evident the impact is very real so universities engaged in widening participation work should appreciate this dynamic more and the stresses it can produce on students and families with demanding caring responsibilities. In effect, how can two worlds become one shared world and is this feasible in developing university action plans? Some of

these complex issues are also faced by many first-generation working-class students and some universities have attempted to address these issues with some success (Wainwright and Watts, 2021).

The Importance of Capital

A significant aspect emerging from the three narratives is the importance of possessing different forms of capital, especially social and cultural capital in relation to negotiating the everyday demands of university life (Mishra, 2020). However, underlying such forms of social and cultural capital – meaning here, the formal and informal networks that assist cooperation within and between individuals and groups (Son, 2020) – is the importance of having actual financial support and assistance to continue studying and maintain a physical presence and to be able to afford the expenses that arise from participating in higher education. All three testimonies, at various stages, discuss financial costs as having an important bearing on what has been undertaken and achieved, alongside the role played by part-time work and combining this with unpaid caring obligations. This is an issue facing many students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds (Brown and James, 2020). It is recognised here that the pressure of playing multiple roles has a cost to it, and university structures could better allow for the use of hardship funds to support students in such precarious positions. The narratives also raise fundamental questions about the impact of tuition fees and debt burdens, as seen in the English context.

Caring for Others, but also Self-Care

A further theme that is clearly identifiable from the testimonies is the health and well-being impact that caring for other family members has on the person studying and/or working at university. Such cultural concerns often relate to wider extended family relationships and an experience of 'guilt' is often felt in terms of the fact that time spent on university work is time spent away from often more pressing and immediate family responsibilities. Further, time at university can be regarded as somehow 'delaying' other life options and choices, such as starting a family and seeking paid work to support the household. The assumptions and expectations that lie behind such lifecycle markers for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people are deeply embedded and culturally significant – to be working, contributing to the household, married, a parent – all by certain ages – is part of the 'stuff' of growing up in the communities (Marcus, 2019). University, in practice, can become relegated to a 'side project', even when studying full-time. It is recognised here that what counts as 'caring' also needs to be extended to notions of self-care, to allow the university 'world' the time and space it requires. Caring, we suggest, is not just about 'caring for others', it is the ability to be able to say 'no' to demands asked of us, as well as knowing when to take time out from additional requests. All three narratives talk about tiredness, exhaustion and the dangerous presence of 'burnout', and how this needs to be recognised.

Supporting Structures and People

The final key theme to arise from the testimonies is one around the available supporting structures and services at university for carers, as well as the importance of key individuals – usually academic staff and supervisors – who might act as mentors, supporters or champions. Whether arriving at university at 17 or 26, the matter of managing transitions to university needs to be fully realised and appreciated for all students, but especially those who are first-generation students and are coming from families where collective caring is the norm and there are high expectations of family involvement. Offering flexible modes of studying and individually-tailored curriculum design, as well as suitable assessment regimes, can make a world of difference. For example, offering a curriculum that in some way reflects the realities of Traveller life, family circumstances and week-to-week timetables can help enormously. We would also note here that offering additional ‘time management’ classes are not always the effective ‘one size fits all’ solution that is so often imagined by university managers.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated that although Gypsy, Roma and Traveller student access to, and presence within, universities is gaining attention, there needs to be more focus on how such students navigate higher education experiences when there are significant, culturally specific, extended family and community-centred caring responsibilities. Often, it feels as if the widening access conversation is dominated by just getting such students ‘in the door’ and not really considering what supporting mechanisms and structures are necessary to allow students not only to stay, but to flourish and succeed. Although the three narratives are not necessarily reflective of the experiences of *all* Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students – how could they be – they do illustrate that there are (thematic) threads of commonality across our experiences that are likely to be experienced by other Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students. In closing, we would want to stress that just because some people can traverse the barriers, this does not mean that all are able to do so. There is a real danger in trying to hold anyone up as an archetypal ‘role model’ or idealised ‘community champion’ – it can lead to charges of ‘if they can do it, why can’t you?’ This kind of ‘heroic struggle’ and ‘individual resilience’ narrative is very common in higher education today. We have argued that making space and time for student carers and their families – focussing on life *off-campus* as well as *on-campus* – is important; otherwise, we are again relying on individuals to bear the burden of wider societal failings in balancing family-based caring and pursuing higher education.

Note

- 1 ‘Extenuating circumstances’ can be applied for during university courses to ensure that penalties are not issued if, for example, submitting assessments late or missing examinations. It is a formal process that operates in most UK universities.

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7 Resisting Colonisation

Indigenous Student-Parents' Experiences of Higher Education

Rebecca D. Cox and Michelle Pidgeon

Over the past five decades, policies and programmes targeting Indigenous students have resulted in increased participation among First Nation, Métis and Inuit¹ students in Canadian higher education (Battiste, 2000; Pidgeon, 2014, 2019b; Stonechild, 2006). Still, Indigenous students' postsecondary enrolment and completion rates remain considerably lower than those of non-Indigenous Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2015). Furthermore, the extant research on Indigenous postsecondary students continues to point to systemic barriers and racism as key hindrances to their access, retention, and success throughout higher education (e.g. Gallop and Bastien, 2016; Parent, 2017; Restoule, 2011; Shotton et al., 2013). Across Canada, nearly one-third of Indigenous students attending universities and about half of those enrolled in community colleges are also parents (Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2005). By attending to the experiences of Indigenous student-parents (and more specifically, in this case, student-mothers), we contribute to the existing body of literature on Indigenous student persistence and success, as well as to the growing body of research on the challenges of navigating largely careless postsecondary environments (Moreau, 2016; Moreau and Kerner, 2015). Our findings offer an expanded view of wholistic support for Indigenous students and for student-parents more broadly. Ultimately, by listening to Indigenous student-parents as they challenge colonial institutional norms to accomplish their goals, we consider these students' visioning of how postsecondary institutions can better support their educational journeys.

We begin by outlining the broader context, including ongoing colonial impacts on Indigenous students' experiences in postsecondary education. We weave together the literatures on Indigenous students and student-parents to demonstrate the complexity of being Indigenous, women, parents and students, then move to discussion of our research. After providing a brief overview of methodological details, we present three lessons learned from the Indigenous student-mothers. Their stories offer important teachings and demonstrate strength, resiliency and ways of being a 'new warrior' (Hare and Pidgeon, 2011) in pushing back against colonisation along their postsecondary journeys. Indigenous participation and

success in higher education should be considered wholistically – from access and persistence to the attainment of their education and career goals.

Colonial Influences on Indigenous Participation in Higher Education

Prior to the 1960s in Canada, First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) peoples' participation in postsecondary education was limited. Up until that point, the Canadian government's provision of education to 'Indians' represented a broader 'civilising' and assimilation project, aimed at enculturating them into the ostensibly superior European social and economic values, and erasing their own cultural identity and heritage. Unilaterally federally imposed legislation designated Indigenous peoples as wards of the Canadian government, and instituted policies aimed at involuntarily enfranchising them into the Canadian state while eliminating their status (and associated rights). Earning a university degree, for example, was accompanied by coerced enfranchisement. Furthermore, these policies created a two-tiered educational system whereby education for non-Indigenous education was under provincial jurisdiction and education for First Nations peoples was a federal responsibility. This division of authority and funding streams institutionalised systemic inequities in the provision of public education that have yet to be resolved (see, for example, Anderson and Richards, 2016). It was not until the early 1970s that the Canadian government recognised FNMI rights as existing before and separate from colonial law (Newhouse and Belanger, 2010), paving the way for later revisions to the Indian Act, legal claims to self-governance and Indigenous control over education, and calls for large-scale decolonisation efforts. The legacy of these colonial policies continues to affect Indigenous students' pathways through the K-12 system and reproduces systemic disparities in postsecondary access and attainment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians (Gerber, 2014; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

Support for Indigenous participation in Canadian higher education began in the mid-1970s, when the Canadian government developed funding guidelines for Indigenous postsecondary students. From 1972 to 1978, the number of First Nations students enrolled in postsecondary education increased from 800 to 2606 (Stonechild, 2006). The development of Indigenous-focused programmes, such as Native Teacher Education programmes and Native Studies during the 1970s and 1980s, and the subsequent expansion of Indigenous student support services helped boost Indigenous postsecondary enrolments (Pidgeon, 2019b; Stonechild, 2006). However, the resources aimed at increasing Indigenous enrolment and, to a certain extent, persistence in higher education have not kept pace with the need. Nor have these resources changed the fundamental nature of these colonial institutions. Over the past decade, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) and individual researchers (e.g. Clark et al., 2014; Gerber, 2014; Ottmann, 2017) have continued to document the pervasive effects of Canada's colonial assimilation agenda throughout higher education, illustrating the many ways that funding streams, policies, curricula, instruction and the norms embedded in postsecondary practices exclude, marginalise and tokenise Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous Student-Parents and Postsecondary Success

Embedded in the colonial structures of higher education is an additional exclusionary dimension: the construct of the ‘careless’ student (Lynch, 2010). Higher education constructs academic work as a purely intellectual endeavour, undertaken by autonomous individuals who pursue education as an investment in marketable skills (*ibid.*; see also Lynch’s chapter in this volume). This comes into direct conflict with Indigenous cultural values of family and collective responsibility. Although the cultural value of family and extended networks is acknowledged and supported within the context of Indigenous student services, the broader institution is unlikely to consider the interconnectedness of these roles and responsibilities in generating class schedules, providing on-campus day care, or crafting housing policies, especially family housing (HeavyRunner and DeCelles, 2002; HeavyRunner and Marshall, 2003; Waterman et al., 2018).

Thus, for Indigenous student-parents, who already represent an ‘other’ in higher education, assumptions about the normative postsecondary student additionally clash with their caregiving roles, when being a good parent means attending college or university and serving as a good role model and provider for their families (Waterman and Lindley, 2013; Waterman et al., 2018). Research documenting the conflict between parent and student identities that students must navigate in careless postsecondary contexts underscores the complexity for racialised students. For example, Estes (2011) found that Black women in her study encountered messages that they were not expected to succeed in either role – as students or as parents. This finding echoes the racial stereotypes that Indigenous student-parents face, given that Indigenous peoples’ capacities as parents and students have been challenged and compromised throughout Canada’s colonial history.

Success for Indigenous student-parents is multifaceted. It includes the range of individual actions from deciding to attend, applying and being accepted, and persisting in the face of systemic barriers while maintaining cultural integrity (Pidgeon, 2008). For many Indigenous students, success is not about their individual attainment. Instead, success in higher education is inseparable from giving back to their families and communities, and supporting the next generation (Pidgeon, 2008).

The Indigenous Wholistic Framework

In order to explore the experiences of Indigenous student-mothers, we worked within an Indigenous Wholistic Framework (Pidgeon, 2008) (Figure 7.1). This framework represents Indigenous ways of knowing and being, which are informed by place (e.g. lands/waters, traditional territories). The individual is at the centre, and highlights individuals’ embeddedness in a set of nested relationships, where the most immediate connections are with family, and extend to their community, their nation and beyond. Intersecting these connections are the four realms: the physical, intellectual, spiritual and emotional aspects of living and being. In using a ‘w’ to spell wholistic, the framework calls attention to the Indigenous sense of wholeness and well-being that is tied to balance across the four realms. Surrounding the

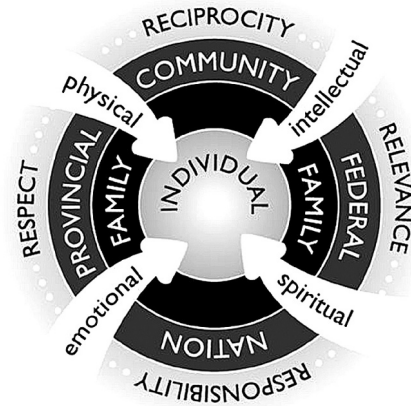


Figure 7.1 The Indigenous Wholistic Framework (IWF) is grounded in the lands and waters as these teachings inform the interconnectedness of the physical, emotional, cultural and intellectual realms of an individual. It also expands these realms to be inclusive of the interrelationships between an individual, family, community, nation. The IWF also speaks to the government-to-government-to-government relationships unique to Indigenous peoples with both provincial/territorial and federal governments. The IWF is informed by the 4Rs (Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991) of respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility.

framework are the principles of respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility (Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991). These values guided aspects of the research process and our joint approach to the analysis of the participants' stories.

As a whole, this framework highlights the complex balance among the multiple roles that Indigenous student-mothers assume (e.g. mother, student, partner, daughter, auntie, community member) and offers an integrative perspective on these students' responsibilities, rather than reifying the traditional dichotomy (student/worker vs caregiver).

Methodology

Our analysis relies on qualitative interview data from two studies. The first study focused on the perspectives of student-parents at one community college in British Columbia. Designed to explore the experiences of student-parents and the resources that they relied on to pursue postsecondary education, the study incorporated one-on-one, in-person, qualitative interviews (Roulston, 2010) with student-parents. As the principal investigator, Cox conducted 60- to 90-minute interviews with the larger sample of student-parents who participated in the study, including three participants who identified as Indigenous.

The second study focused on the experiences of Indigenous students at two universities in British Columbia. Following Indigenous research protocols (e.g. Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012), Indigenous researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with the larger sample of Indigenous university students, six of whom

identified as student-parents. Guided by a semi-structured interview protocol designed, in part, by Pidgeon, a co-principal investigator, the interviews elicited participants' stories of how they came to the university, how they thought about postsecondary success, and the barriers to and supports for realising that success.

Recognising the importance of considering the distinct experience of Indigenous postsecondary students who are parents, we realised that the interviews with Indigenous student-parents across the two studies compose a complementary data set. In both studies, the interviews with the Indigenous student-parents provided the opportunity for participants to reflect on (a) their pathways into and through postsecondary education, (b) their experiences as students in colleges and universities where the traditional (and ideal) student is neither Indigenous nor a parent, and (c) their perspectives on successfully navigating those challenges. Ultimately, these women's perspectives highlight values that are marginalised within the traditional structures of Canadian higher education.

Participants

The nine Indigenous mothers ranged in age from 27 to 48. Several of these mothers (Stephanie, Angela and Naomi) were raising children under age four as they pursued postsecondary education, but most of the participants' children were enrolled in the K-12 system. Five of the women planned to become teachers, while others were enrolled in health sciences, nursing, social work and linguistics. Most were pursuing postsecondary education within programmes aimed at Indigenous students, whether through Native Teacher Education programmes or Indigenous Studies.²

Analytical Approach

As a collaboration between an Indigenous scholar and a white, Settler scholar, our analytical approach represents a hybrid of an Indigenous research paradigm (Pidgeon, 2019a), and a constructionist approach to narrative analysis (see Esin et al., 2014). We drew on specific analytical strategies from interpretive, qualitative research traditions while orienting ourselves theoretically and methodologically with two Indigenous frameworks: the Indigenous Wholistic Framework, and the principles of Indigenous storytelling (Archibald, 2008). Both of these frameworks reflect Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding, and guided us to foreground the principles of respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility throughout the entire process (Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991).

Our collaborative analysis involved drafting narrative summaries for each participant, and using those texts as the basis for dialogue about what spoke to us in each participant's interview, and what knowledge or assumptions we were bringing to bear on each story. As we engaged in dialogue, we revised the narrative summaries to reflect our expanding understandings, which were informed by (a) the direct experience of each principal investigator with participants in her own study, (b) our learning from each other across the Indigenous-Coloniser hyphen (Jones and Jenkins, 2008) and (c) our frequent re-reading of the transcribed words of the participants (i.e. their stories).

We also coded each transcript by looking for themes within the four realms of the Indigenous Wholistic Framework. Not surprisingly, as we examined aspects of participants' experiences that fell into the intellectual realm, we found that those experiences were also integrally connected to at least one of the other three realms. This underscored the need for us to represent participants' experiences in a wholistic way, illustrating the integral connections across realms.

Ultimately, our discussions about these nine women's experiences and insights generated learnings about the interspace of being Indigenous, a parent and a post-secondary student that we followed like threads in a complex weaving. Following these threads led us to identify three collective lessons, each embodying critical insights about how these Indigenous women have pushed back against colonial norms embedded in Canadian higher education. From an Indigenous perspective, stories comprise woven threads with multiple meanings – all of which depend on the relationship between the storyteller (or re-teller) and the listener (see, for example, Archibald, 2008). Given the value of storytelling within Indigenous cultures, trustworthiness comes from the storyteller's ability to retell the stories they are told with accuracy and reverence. Throughout our analytical process, we aimed to uphold these storytelling principles, and we looked to the Indigenous Wholistic Framework to guide us as we collaborated with each other, engaged with the nine participants' stories, and worked to represent the collective and individual stories that were shared with us.

Teachings from Indigenous Student-Parents

In this section, we represent these women's experiences as teachings that we learned from as we listened to and discussed their stories. Each of the three lessons reflects our attentiveness to the overlap across the four realms of the Indigenous Wholistic Framework, while highlighting the integral connection between self and family that is also at the heart of the framework. We encourage the readers to think wholistically, and attend to the overlaps as they hear and reflect on these stories. We also recognise the possibility for multiple interpretations of each story shared; it is understood across Indigenous storytelling traditions that listeners hear the lessons that they need when engaging with stories (Archibald, 2008). There are many lessons to be learned from Indigenous student-parents.

Lesson One: Responsibility to Others

As these Indigenous women spoke about their paths into and through postsecondary education, they conveyed intersecting aspirations. In part, they spoke about their individual trajectories, as in Justine's description of the value of postsecondary education:

It means that there's another door that opens for me in the future – career opportunities that – and it's success just for myself, personally too. But it's not for me; it is not just about, (pause) it's not just about career; it's about feeling like I've accomplished something personally in my life.

At the same time, the reasons for pursuing postsecondary education and the motivation for persisting were integrally connected to these students' responsibilities to family and to community. For instance, Stephanie, a single mother of one child, explicitly connected her educational trajectory to her commitment as a mother:

I think I see having a kid as like my biggest motivation to be at school as well. So being a parent does make it a lot harder, but if I didn't have him, I don't know if I would have the motivation to be there anyways. ... Oh, yeah. I keep going because of him.

Similarly, Anita, who decided to pursue a postsecondary degree after the death of her ex-husband, spoke of the decision to attend university as a necessity. After spending a year in her home community, grieving the loss of her children's father, she came to this realisation:

There was no – it was a dead end for me, for my personal story. And I had to really look at it and think 'how am I going to get out of here and what am I going to do? Because now I have three boys and I need to provide for my kids. I need to be self-sufficient'.

For Anita, remaining in her home community was no longer an option, and the primary impetus for finding a new path was her concern for her children.

It seems stressful but when I don't focus on it and I'm just going through my day-to-day life, it isn't as hard for me, because I drew – I was in a counseling session and she said to draw myself my own vision. What do I want to be doing? What goal am I looking at? And it's standing in front of [university] with big totems and big building, and Bachelor of Education. I'm going to do it. That's what I want to do. I'm going to be a teacher and I'm going to be able to go back to my people and teach my own people's children.

Across these individual journeys to higher education we heard the interconnect- edness of commitment to self, family and Indigenous community as reasons for pursuing postsecondary education.

In addition to providing the motivation to begin postsecondary education, connections to family, home and community proved essential to postsecondary persistence. Childcare offered by family members was an indispensable support, and connections to family and home were critical to students' wholistic wellbeing.

'My Mom Stopped Work Just for Me'

For these mothers, particularly those with young children, close relatives such as mothers, in-laws, partners and siblings provided critical childcare assistance. Angela, for example, relied on her husband to care for their baby while she attended uni- versity full-time. Family was even more central for the single mothers. Stephanie, a

single mother of one boy, identified her own mom as a crucial part of her support system.

I have a really good support system. My mom, she lives in the same building as I do. She stopped working maybe four years ago, and ever since then she's just been taking care of [my son], and making sure he makes it to and from school every day so that I can make it to school every day. And she's a big help for me when I need to study – she'll take care of him.

Later, Stephanie clarified that her mother had received job offers after leaving her job, but declined so that she could support Stephanie in completing her postsecondary degree. 'So, I know she did it just for me'.

For Stephanie, relying on her mother for childcare while she pursued her nursing degree helped to address the broader systemic barrier facing postsecondary student-parents: the absence of reliable and affordable childcare options compounded by the careblind orientation of the college (Moreau, 2016; Sallee and Cox, 2019). In fact, her postsecondary trajectory had been delayed multiple times because of this specific challenge. Before her son reached school-age, Stephanie struggled to find viable childcare.

I would always find somebody who would say 'ok I can babysit him for you while you go to school.' And then something would always happen and it wouldn't work out. And day care was really expensive and it's hard to get kids into day-care programmes.

Naomi, a single mother with two young boys, enumerated the financial cost of day care as well as the stress caused by the ongoing search for funding. Initially, Naomi had hoped to attend college during the day. However, after reviewing the cost of licensed childcare programmes and finding out that the childcare subsidies she qualified for would require re-application every three months, she revised her plans. As she explained,

Childcare for both my kids was \$2,400 a month, a completely insane, out-of-the-world price. The childcare subsidy only pays half of that, so the other half would have to come out of my pocket – which doesn't fit into my budget whatsoever and I'd have to be running around every three months [to fill out applications].

As a low-income parent, Naomi could apply for a government-funded childcare subsidy. However, she found that affordable day-care alternatives were limited; even unlicensed family childcare could easily exceed the government childcare subsidy available to low-income parents by more than 100 per cent. The childcare centre located at the college she was attending, while affordable, had a two-year waiting list. Realising that she could not be certain that the childcare subsidies would be renewed after each three-month period, Naomi concluded, 'It's too much', referring both to the monetary cost and the time, energy and stress. Instead, Naomi's

mother quit one of her multiple jobs, and Naomi enrolled in classes that started in the late afternoon. Without her mom, Naomi noted, she would have had to give up on attending college altogether.

'Home Helps Ground Me'

Angela, married and a mother of a young child, spoke about the value of home and family for her and other Indigenous classmates. With deep empathy, she spoke of the emotional stress involved for students who travelled far from home to attend university. Sometimes, she noted, 'people need to just go home'. A self-described 'concrete Indian', Angela described the importance of home in both physical and cultural terms, and how returning home enabled her to feel connected to her core self.

I'm from [city], which is a big city, right? ... I'm a concrete Indian (giggle). I don't know anything about the landscape, being with the earth and those kind of things, but even I have to go home to [city] and when I do go home to [city], I find that that brings me back to a more realistic sense of self, ... and it helps ground me, you know. That's for me. If I were coming from a small cultural town, or First Nations band and had always seen my cousins, my aunts, my elders, and all of a sudden, here I am at this university, I can't even imagine what that would be like.

Continuing, Angela referenced multiple kinds of disconnections between home and university, including the separation from family, the physical distance between home and campus, and the cultural disconnection. Consequently, she explained, there were times that her Indigenous classmates needed to return home to re-establish balance.

Some of my friends have had to stop coming to school because of children – their children's issues that they have to move back to the reserve to take care of; or deaths in their family; or you know, basically just having to take that cultural break to go home.

Similarly, Sarah described the emotional cost of the disconnection from home:

Most of us were having to take complete removal from our general lives and just be a university student, and then that creates the depression and the disconnectedness, and then when I get to that point I get angry ... and it's such a circle that instead of feeling like you can succeed, it just builds where it's just all self-defeating.

Sarah also articulated the sacrifices involved in pursuing postsecondary education, of being away from cultural and family responsibilities. She made it clear that her supporters at home (e.g. children, family, friends) had to understand the difficulty of balancing postsecondary attendance with family and cultural responsibilities.

My kids and my sister – they all understand. I completely disengage, I don't participate in a lot of the family stuff and they also don't hold me accountable for not coming to participate. I think if people were holding me accountable for not participating, I would give up the school stuff so much more easily – definitely.

Navigating the pull of responsibilities back home is also something that Tricia, the oldest of eight granddaughters, delineated. For her, the physical and cultural distance between home and school made it difficult for her to provide the guidance that her family members expected of her, and she mused, 'What can I do about it when I'm down here?'

It was hard, because a lot of people count on me, being pretty much the oldest granddaughter. And then all my cousins ... So all the girls are always calling me looking for advice, so I guess it's just me getting them to get along on their own and getting them to figure out – you know. ... And then getting other family to know that I'm here for school: 'I'm strictly here,' 'don't call me,' 'figure it out yourself' kind of thing.

For women like Tricia, postsecondary attendance required that they bear not only the financial cost of relocation but also the emotional and cultural costs of being distant from their communities and families. Furthermore, colleges and universities generally fail to recognise the broader family and cultural responsibilities borne by Indigenous students. For Indigenous student-parents, who maintain the responsibility of passing on their knowledges and traditions to their children, living away from their territories or raising their children within urban contexts that have limited access to cultural resources and supports exacerbates the difficulties. Often these cultural supports are found on-campus through the Indigenous Student Centre or off-campus at urban Indigenous organisations (e.g. Native Friendship Centres) and are discussed more fully in Lesson Three.

Lesson Two: Challenging Expectations

Merely by pursuing postsecondary education as Indigenous students and as parents, these women challenged the normative construction of postsecondary students and pushed back against Canada's colonial agenda. The following stories reveal how they experienced the effects of systemic racism and navigated discriminatory practices and policies. Ultimately, their stories expand the dominant narrative about who belongs in higher education, and offer a broader vision for supporting Indigenous student-parents' postsecondary success.

Challenging Postsecondary Student Norms

These Indigenous women shared vivid examples of discrimination and racism throughout their educational paths. Stephanie, who had dropped out of high school to have her son, returned to school with a clear plan to complete her high school diploma, pursue

nursing pre-requisites at a nearby university, then apply for a seat in a nursing programme. In spite of this express goal, Stephanie's counsellor advised her to take Home Economics for her science requirement in case she 'couldn't make it' in Biology, and placed her in vocational math, instead of the academic math course that she needed for nursing. This placement conveyed the school's low confidence in her future success and ultimately lengthened the amount of time it took to complete the nursing pre-requisites and enrol in the four-year Bachelor in Science Nursing (BSN) programme.

As a 27-year-old, third-year college student, Stephanie was able to reflect back on these schooling experiences and identify subsequent examples of racial stereotyping within the curriculum, in classroom interactions, and in one-on-one encounters with instructors and peers. She shared a conversation she had with one of the clinical instructors early on in her BSN programme.

She [the instructor] said something about 'oh what nationality are you?' and I said 'I'm First Nations' and she said 'are you the only one in your family to go to college?' And I was like 'no, actually, I come from an educated family.' And she said 'but that's just you and your family, right?' It almost seemed like she was trying to give me a compliment but it was very, very offensive.

Not only did Stephanie find it insulting, but she also felt constrained in responding. She wanted to speak up more forcefully, she explained:

But I felt like because there was such a power imbalance between us that I couldn't say anything. ... When you're in clinical there's always a chance that if you don't mesh well with your instructor that you can be held back.

This power imbalance maintains higher stakes for students when the very welfare of their children is at risk. Stephanie understood that she would need to proceed very carefully through the programme to minimise this implicit threat. Later in her programme, during another clinical course, the threat materialised in the form of the attendance policy. After 'one time' when she stayed home with her sick child for the day, the clinical instructor let her know that although her performance in clinic was 'fine', she would not be able to pass the course if she missed another day. Stephanie did not question the policy, even though it forced her to attend clinical on a day when both she and her son were sick. She dragged herself to the clinical session, and worried about her son for the duration. When asked whether there might have been other ways to work around the policy, she replied:

It's interesting because there is another student who – he doesn't have kids, but he missed two days of clinical and he somehow passed through, so I'm sure there is a way, but I don't know. I just don't want to be in a sticky situation ever again.

Given her prior experience with racial stereotyping, as well as her commitment to completing her degree for the benefit of her family, Stephanie realised that her best course of action would be to avoid any 'sticky' situations.

Trudy, a student who pursued a university degree after her divorce, shared examples of how racial discrimination shaped her day-to-day experiences on campus. Describing an incident that occurred during her first semester, she recounted:

We were in the midst of midterms and studying. I was coming up to campus one day and I was really tired and I just threw my hair in some braids and put on a bandana, and I was over in the Campus Activity Centre and I wanted to get a snack after studying. And as I was walking up to the cafeteria, a young man in his 20s was walking towards me. I knew that something was not right, just by the way he was smirking and looking at me, and as he walked by, he said 'S'up Chief?' and just kept walking. As I walked back out of the building, he was there with about six of his friends and then he proceeded to point at me, and they're all whispering and laughing and pointing. Had I known the security number, I would have called them and asked them to walk with me because I didn't feel safe.

This account highlights compromises to Trudy's safety across the four realms, as she identified risks to her physical, emotional, cultural and intellectual wellbeing. Nor was this first-semester encounter an anomaly. Trudy described other classroom-level experiences during her second year of university that were so harsh that she considered quitting school entirely.

The racism I experienced from my cohort was really horrible. They would say, 'oh she's pulling the Indian card again,' or 'she's lazy, and I'm sick of her riding my coat tails.' It was really horrible ... Meanwhile, I needed this course to graduate, and I had no other choice than to work with these people.

What Stephanie and Trudy shared represent broader truths about postsecondary experiences for all of the Indigenous women we interviewed, including the pervasiveness of racism both inside and outside classrooms, and the sheer determination to persist that these students demonstrated as they navigated profoundly unsafe environments. Moreover, as parents, their postsecondary aspirations were integrally linked to their caregiving responsibilities, raising the stakes of their success or failure.

Challenging the Dominant Narrative of Student Success

When Angela shared instances of her leadership and advocacy on campus for other Indigenous students, she made explicit her underlying belief that Indigenous student success is not an individual endeavour. For example, Angela framed student success at university largely as an outgrowth of a student's engagement, but pushed back against the idea that it is solely dependent on each individual student, providing concrete suggestions for ways that the university might be able to facilitate engaging experiences for Indigenous students. In the same way that she felt responsible for other Indigenous students' success and acted accordingly, she believed that the university should 'stand up' for Indigenous students.

Sarah similarly noted that institutions should be providing more support for Indigenous student persistence. Like Angela, Sarah acknowledged her own role in taking the initiative for learning and seeking help, noting, ‘I know I’m self-accountable, ... and I should be engaging and stuff. ... I get that I’m supposed to be doing all the right steps’. But she also expressed concern that at times, her search for assistance lacked any kind of ‘two-way dialogue’, and that without such reciprocity, her efforts might be in vain. She then shared a story about her own children’s high school experience.

An example from my life, which is something that created absolute success in my children’s life. Both my older children quit high school. They absolutely could not engage – there was just no way they could be there. And not from my lack of wanting to them to. When they both exited the school system – it took almost a year for this to happen – a gentleman phones up and says ‘Hi, my understanding is you’ve quit school and I want to know what we can do to bring you back. And so they each had a conversation. At the end of it, they both walked out with a [high school diploma] under a programme that that school district chose to create to ensure that it could help all the Indigenous students that were exiting their walls.

In Sarah’s telling, the high school accomplished the necessary two-way dialogue with her children, and, by taking steps to engage with Indigenous students, was able to more effectively support their pathways through the system. This offered a lesson for her own postsecondary institution.

So, I look at that here and think that there has to be someone who becomes the champion and it’s not the someone who gets to sit in an office and be furthering themselves in their own academic way. It has to be that the focus is directing attention to all those things that aren’t working right.

Implicit in Sarah’s statement is the distinction between postsecondary personnel who perpetuate the status quo and those who advocate change. Without people inside the institution who are willing to be ‘the champion’, the things that are not working right will continue to push Indigenous students away.

Lesson Three: Resiliency through Relationships On- and Off-Campus

Finally, listening to these Indigenous student-mothers teaches us the power of relational support, particularly the support from students’ extended family. In addition to naming the specific family members who were enabling them to pursue postsecondary education, the students described their on-campus support system as part of their relational support network, using phrases like ‘family’ and ‘home’ to express the nature of the support provided by Indigenous student services staff, Indigenous faculty, and other Indigenous students. Justine, for instance, when asked how she managed to persist at university, described ‘a lot of support’ from her husband, children, mom and friends, then identified specific staff members at the

university's Indigenous Student Centre (ISC) as well as Indigenous students that she met through the ISC. For Justine, the Indigenous students and staff at ISC formed part of the same network of support as her immediate family.

Those [spaces like the Indigenous Student Centre] are the only places that I really seek ... I don't go anyplace else, on the university. It's not because I don't get along well with other students, 'cause I do, but it's more ... it's just more of a connection in those rooms right. It's *more family*, right, even though they're not, I guess.

Students consistently highlighted the critical role of Indigenous advisors and spaces in facilitating these family-like connections. Elizabeth described the value of the university's Native House by saying, 'So it's a home away from home, which is really nice'. Likewise, Stephanie noted, '[The Indigenous Gathering Space] has been really helpful for me. I spend all my time there studying and, yeah, talking with the other students and having the advisor close by'. Appreciation for intergenerational support was evident in many students' reflections, including Anita's reference to the Elder on her campus: 'She's amazing. It's like having a grandma that just is like "do your homework. You can do this. Focus!"' Underscoring the value of this campus-based extended family, Anita asserted, 'They help me when I need it. They are there through thick and thin, black and blue, they're there'.

Drawing strength from their family – family members at home as well as this extended kin network – enabled these women to balance the intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of their postsecondary journeys while navigating the responsibilities of being parents. At times, these extended networks alleviated some of the emotional stress caused by physical and cultural disconnections in being far from home or at least buffered them from some of the negative effects of prejudice, discrimination and systemic racism. Such networks also increased students' resilience in dealing with various administrative and academic challenges as they managed the gaps between the culturally relevant supports available through Indigenous student services and the rest of the institution.

Trudy, in reflecting on one of the difficult classroom-level encounters she experienced, identified it as 'that, in itself, was an incident that I could have walked away from [the university]'. Continuing, she highlighted the powerful support of her campus-based family, including Indigenous peers and Indigenous faculty members:

But thankfully I'm a student who is aware of what you need to do when you come up against such an obstacle. I think if I didn't have that knowledge, I would have thought I didn't have any grounds to stand on and walked away, but I think that I've been blessed to have older students and faculty to show me how to properly address issues like that.

This excerpt illustrates the strength of these cultural values, including the shared responsibility for family members' success and well-being. As an Indigenous

student, Trudy is part of a postsecondary family in which those who have come before her share their wisdom; she, in turn, feels responsible for improving other Indigenous students' experiences.

Visioning Wholistic Support for Indigenous Student-Parents

As these stories demonstrate, Canadian colleges and universities have not yet gotten it right. Embedded in each woman's narrative are concrete and tangible actions that postsecondary institutions can take in order to create environments where Indigenous students can thrive.

In visioning wholistic support for Indigenous students, the Indigenous women offered the following principles and suggestions.

Postsecondary institutions need to acknowledge the pervasiveness of institution-wide racism and work harder to minimise the effects of students. As Trudy noted, students, staff and faculty should all be familiar with policies and protocols for responding to racism. For Indigenous students, the absence of such protocols may threaten their well-being, including their physical safety, making it imperative to inform new students of such risks. As she put it, 'It's sad, but I think it's really necessary for new students to know that kind of information'. Institutions also have a responsibility to engage students inside classrooms with learning environments that are truly relevant and respectful. Trudy's words apply here as well, 'It shouldn't be so hard – the onus shouldn't have to be on Indigenous students to create a friendly learning environment'.

A collective responsibility for students' well-being would also mean that Indigenous students' family, community and cultural commitments would be accommodated through policies and practices. At the very least, policies (such as the attendance policy in Stephanie's course) that have a disproportionate effect on student-parents or on Indigenous students need to be revised. But the women we spoke to offered more specific recommendations that would help students feel connected, and their suggestions highlighted the primacy of family – both inside and outside of postsecondary institutions. Elizabeth, for example, suggested that students be allowed to bring children to class.

I've seen other kids here; they like it cause they're with all the big people. The instructors here, if you say to them, 'I'm really stuck, I have to bring my son with me', they're like, 'okay, as long as they aren't disrupting the class'. There is a girl in my class right now, she and her husband are both taking the same course – they bring their baby and everyone really likes it. ... yeah, so the people in our class, they love it, they love the baby.

Ultimately, wholistic support for students should be the model for the entire university, not just Indigenous student services (Pidgeon, 2016). If the level and quality of relational support afforded students through Indigenous student services offices were integrated across postsecondary institutions, we believe students' experiences would be radically different.

Wholistic Weavings: Concluding Thoughts

Using the Indigenous Wholistic Framework allowed us to hear lessons from each of the nine participants' stories and to weave connections among the individual stories into the collective teachings: responsibility to others, challenging expectations and resiliency through relationships. Through this collaborative analysis, we created a space for working the hyphen in the Indigenous-Coloniser relationship (Jones and Jenkins, 2008), hearing the voices of Indigenous student-parents, and deepening our own understandings of the nuanced and multifaceted challenges this group of students contends with. The wisdom of Tuck and Yang's (2014) words about social science research comes to mind: 'Research may not be the intervention that is needed' (p. 224). What is needed is more action, so that Indigenous student-parents' educational experiences are strength-based and culturally empowering.

The primacy and power of Indigenous students' family support and cultural connections highlight the impoverished and narrow version of postsecondary education that pits caregiving responsibilities against academic study. In addition to the persistent challenges securing reliable and affordable childcare – an issue that has not been resolved in Canada – student-parents face identity conflicts as they navigate competing demands. Exploring these identity conflicts, scholars such as Estes (2011) and Moreau and Kerner (2015) described an approach to reconciling the conflict that involves a blending of identities, whereby individuals find ways to unite their student/worker and parenting roles. At the same time, these scholars cautioned that such a strategy does not necessarily disrupt the dominant discourse around the ideal student. Indeed, adopting the strategy does not challenge the fundamental paradigm of individuals striving within the system. The notion of blending conflicting identities is, in itself, an extension of the colonial project of assimilation, placing the onus on the individual to conform to a system that disregards collective goals and interests.

The teachings of the Indigenous student-parents in this study offer a more transformative vision of support, specifically, structures, policies and practices that recognise and value students' wholistic (integrated) identities as women, mothers, students and Indigenous people, such that they are no longer subjected to assimilation or blending rhetoric that inherent implies that for them to be postsecondary students they have to leave some of who they are at the door. By persisting, these women are challenging norms and decolonising the academy; it is now the institution's turn to decolonise the programmes, policies and services with the aim of wholistically supporting Indigenous students.

Notes

- 1 Throughout this chapter, we use the terms Indigenous and FNMI interchangeably to include the more than 60 different nations and over 1.7 million First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples across Canada.
- 2 We use pseudonyms to shield their identities, but recognise that the small number of Indigenous student-mothers attending these postsecondary institutions requires additional measures to ensure confidentiality. We therefore do not provide detailed demographic data, nor do we refer to the women's nations.

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8 How the ‘caring chain’ impacts the decision to study abroad, overseas experiences and career plan

A narrative analysis about a Chinese single mother

Xuemeng Cao

Introduction

With a shift of global higher education (HE) from an elite to a mass orientation (UNESCO, 1998), many countries (e.g. UK, Australia) have devoted considerable effort to widening participation in HE (ACER, 2011; DfES, 2003), with one of the target cohorts being mature-age students, a certain proportion of whom are parents or have other caring responsibilities (O’Shea, 2015). Notably, with the ideas of lifelong learning widely spread in China, the cohort of Chinese international students, who have typically been construed as being young, single and unencumbered (e.g. Montgomery, 2010), now includes more people of somewhat older age and who have more complicated life trajectories (Zhou, 2010). While mature students (many with dependents) have been encouraged to participate more in HE systems, they have nevertheless remained relatively invisible in the associated scholarly studies and policy circles (Marandet and Wainwright, 2010; Moreau and Kerner, 2015); further, research into international mature students as carers is extremely scarce (Brooks, 2015; Loveridge et al., 2018; Pinter, 2013).

My interest in discussing the experiences of international mature students¹ with caring responsibilities emerged from a longitudinal empirical study exploring the employability-related experiences of UK-educated Chinese taught Master’s students, where one of the participants was a single mother aged over 35 who was accompanied by her daughter, mother and grandmother (mother’s mother) during her overseas studies. From her story, I realised how difficult the decision to study abroad was, how complex overseas life was and how nerve-racking choices about family and career were for an international mature student with a ‘caring chain’. This chapter, although based on only one participant’s account, is nevertheless indicative of the challenges shared by HE student carers and by Chinese students of the ‘One Child Policy’ generation. After reviewing previous research into international student carers, the methodological framework to this study is described. The chapter then narrates the story of the selected participant and discusses how this participant’s mother identity impacted the way she managed her learning and living in the UK and how her wider caring responsibilities shaped her plan for her future life. The chapter ends with suggestions as to how HE institutions might better support international student carers.

Literature review: the invisibility of international student carers

Students with dependents are not in the spotlight of scholarship, although an expansion of studies focusing specifically on this group has been observed since the 2000s (Moreau and Kerner, 2015). Considering the high proportion of female student carers, researchers often accentuate the binary conflict between academic work and caring responsibilities which are culturally associated with women (Moreau and Kerner, 2015; O'Shea, 2015), arguing that the greatest barrier suffered by student-mothers is that of having insufficient time for both study and care, as well as paid employment, social activities and leisure (Marandet and Wainwright, 2010; Stone and O'Shea, 2013). Lack of time traps student carers into a constant balancing act between dedication to their studies, meeting the needs of their dependents, contributing to their family finances and conducting other activities they value (Reay et al., 2002). Juggling the conflicting time commitments with regard to multiple tasks, student carers and student-mothers in particular, are highly likely to experience competing 'identity practices' (Lynch, 2008, p. 595). They attempt to build up their learner identity which allows them feel independent from others without rejecting their carer identities (Gouthro, 2006). However, it is not always possible for student-mothers to balance their dual status, which can easily lead to a sense of guilt regarding their dependents and extended family members (O'Shea, 2015; Stone and O'Shea, 2013) and, indeed, their own academic pursuits (Edwards, 1993).

While there is a body of literature exploring care in academia, there is very little that draws any particular attention to international students with dependents (Brooks, 2015; Myers-Walls et al., 2011), despite some research having mixed domestic and international student carers in its participant groups (e.g. Moreau and Kerner, 2015). There is no denying the fact that student carers from local regions and overseas share many common concerns such as a 'complex negotiation of time' (Edwards et al., 1996, p. 213). However international student carers may face more complicated situations compared to student carers engaging in HE in their home country. In their research into acculturative stress among Asian international students studying in the United States with their spouses and children, Myers-Walls et al. (2011) demonstrated that international student-parents lacked the help from their extended families and other supporting networks (e.g. friends) that they had enjoyed in their home country, which led to them commonly feeling overwhelmed. International student-parents thus had no extra time from academic learning and care to engage in sociocultural adaptation activities, which exacerbated their isolation in the host country. The participants in this study also reported the lack of financial support and proper childcare facilities as key stressors in their overseas lives, which was also the case for finance-constrained domestic student-parents (Marandet and Wainwright, 2010). Another striking point disclosed by Myers-Walls et al. was specific to their male participants, whose adaptation stress was partly constituted by worrying about the well-being of their non-student spouses in the host country. This issue was further articulated by Brooks (2015), who differentiated the experiences of international student-parents by gender. In Brooks' study, all female non-student spouses took on full household responsibilities to support

their male student partners' wholehearted focus on academic work, which led to a high possibility of the female spouses being socially isolated in the host country. Nevertheless, male non-student spouses often shared caring responsibilities with their female student partners, even if the male spouses were not in employment; in such cases, the male spouses were enabled in terms of having their own social and leisure time, to the benefit of their own well-being. In addition to these two studies, focusing specifically on the experiences of international student-parents, the previous literature has also discussed how student-parents' and their children's overseas lives were intertwined and mutually impacted, highlighting student-parents' ambivalence with regard to parenting practices around language and culture. They juggled their children's present needs for adapting to the linguistic and cultural environment in the host country and their children's future needs for maintaining home country identity (Loveridge et al., 2018; Pinter, 2013). These discussions thus call for the formulation of university policies to effect support not only for international student-parents but also for their dependent children, as student-parents' capacity to study well is closely connected to the well-being of their children.

Western-based studies into international student-parents have involved participants from Asia (e.g. Loveridge et al., 2018; Myers-Walls et al., 2011), assuming that this group may face more challenges in their overseas lives compared to their Western counterparts as international students engage with more complicated adaptation practices when there is a greater difference between the host and home cultures (Yeh and Inose, 2003). Among those Asian student-parents, student-parents from China were not large in number. This fact might be understandable since: (1) Chinese laws and policies encourage late marriage and late childbearing (the legal marriage ages in China are 22 for men and 20 for women) and (2) Chinese students prefer to enter their marital lives after the completion of their studies, so that they are less likely to give birth to children during their education. For Chinese people who have already been parents, engaging in high-stakes learning in a foreign country may not be an easy decision, neither for intensive Master's courses nor for time-consuming doctoral courses. International education research referring to Chinese parents is mainly about the 'study mother' (also known as 'peidu mama'), that is, mothers leaving their spouses at home and looking after their children who are studying abroad (Huang and Yeoh, 2005). Whilst acknowledging that the overseas experiences of Chinese study mothers and Chinese international student-mothers may have certain similarities (such as self-sacrifice and social isolation), there is a distinctiveness to Chinese international student-mothers' lives that is worth exploring in depth.

Researchers interested in international student carers have made crucial contributions to our knowledge of the experiences of this unique student cohort and have appealed for more attention to, and support for these people from academic and policy perspectives (Brooks, 2015; Myers-Walls et al., 2011). What is currently absent from the existing literature is knowledge about how international student carers' decisions about studying abroad and planning for their post-study-abroad lives were impacted by their caring responsibilities, and how their care-related considerations fluctuated amid the different stages of their studying abroad. To

address this gap, this chapter draws on data from a Chinese student, a single mother, who was accompanied by all her dependents (daughter, mother and grandmother) during her one-year Master's course in the UK, exploring how her 'caring chain' affected her approach to, experiences of and plans after international HE.

Research methods

The chapter draws on a subset of data collected for a project on Chinese students' employability-related experiences during their one-year Master's courses in Social Sciences in the UK (Cao, 2020). The original research sought to explore the motivations of Chinese students for studying abroad, their employability management practices throughout their year overseas and their career-related plans on completion of their studies. Participants were recruited through ethics-approved criteria sampling and snowball sampling within one research-intensive university in England. The diary-interview method (Zimmerman and Wieder, 1977) was adopted and applied in an 'interview-diary-interview' pattern to collect data during the 2017/2018 academic year (Cao and Henderson, 2020). Participants were asked: (a) to talk about their decision-making process with regard to studying abroad at the first-round interviews held in October 2017, (b) to keep event-based diaries (one full week per month) about their employability-related experiences for nine months (November 2017–July 2018) and (c) to discuss their entries and share their future career plans with the researcher at the post-diary interviews conducted in August 2018. Interviews were semi-structured and each lasted 90–120 minutes. Participants were allowed to choose the language for interviews, and all of them preferred Chinese since they felt more confident with expressing their ideas in their first language. All of the interviews were digitally recorded with the participants' permission and were transcribed and translated in full. In terms of the diary research stage, participants kept electronic diaries based on a semi-structured recording form in Microsoft Word. Participants were prompted to describe their employability-related experiences, to identify the important others in such experiences and to reflect on their gains and losses from such experiences.

In total, 32 Chinese students participated in the original research. Despite the researcher's efforts to recruit a similar number of women and men, gender balance was not achieved due to the gender asymmetry among Chinese international students in the social sciences departments of the sampled university, with 29 women but only 3 men involved in the participant group. Twenty-five of the participants were in the 20–25 age group, with seven over 25, and the oldest being in her late 30s. The oldest participant (with a pseudonym of Fangfang) was a student-mother engaging in unique experiences among the group of participants prior to and during her overseas HE and is the heroine of this chapter. Although the project's research questions did not specifically target student carers, the data provided by Fangfang indicated the significant impacts of her caring responsibilities on her entire overseas life and career-specific considerations. Fangfang's story lent me a particular lens through which to examine the journey of Chinese international student carers, an extremely underrepresented group (rare in number and insufficiently discussed in the literature) compared to typical Chinese international

students, reminding us of the necessity to de-homogenise Chinese international students and interrogate their diversities and distinctiveness.

To present Fangfang's complex and unique experiences, a narrative approach was selected for data analysis. I believe that Fangfang's story, as told via interview and diary data, was best kept intact rather than dispersed into themes. Narratives contain 'wider accounts of social life' (Wong and Breheny, 2018), so the analysis of narratives can illuminate 'how do people make sense of what happened?' in addition to 'what actually happened?' (Bryman, 2016, p. 589). In fact, during the data collection, and the two rounds of interviews in particular, Fangfang was given sufficient flexibility in describing her situations and expressing her feelings in a way that she determined, considering her experiences were difficult to fit into the pre-designed schedule for other participants. Adopting a narrative approach to comprehend Fangfang's data allowed me to reveal how her decisions with regard to studying abroad, her overseas life and post-graduation plan represented a compromise with regard to her caring responsibilities. In the subsequent section of this paper, Fangfang's story is narrated, followed by an analysis which unpacks how the identity of a single mother and the needs of intergenerational support can complicate a Chinese international student carer's overseas journey and long-term life plans.

Fangfang's story: as a single mother, as a single child

At the time of the first-round interview, Fangfang described herself as a mature student in her late 30s who had had 10 years' work experience in a business area in a well-developed city of China (hereafter City B). Fangfang started to think about pursuing international HE when she noticed a potential business opportunity pertaining to arts-based English training which was underdeveloped but promising in City B. She then planned to study for an arts-based Master's course in the UK so as to lay an academic foundation for her entrepreneurship and to find business partners from her classmates or other networks if possible. However, resigning to the need to study abroad was a significant decision, which resulted in various problems that needed to be tackled.

Fangfang was a single parent of a six-year-old girl (pseudonym Xinran). Fangfang thought that it would be an invaluable opportunity for Xinran to experience British education if she could bring her to the UK. Fangfang consulted the international student office of her target university, being informed that it might be easier to get visas if another adult who would be able to take care of Xinran when she was studying could go with them. Fangfang's mother was the only person who could do that, but the problem was that her mother's mother (who was more than 80 years old and had Alzheimer's disease) would also have to come with her if her mother moved to the UK. Fangfang considered her savings, asked the opinions of all her dependents and decided to apply for the four visas this would require, whilst at the same time anticipating her applications would be refused. Fortunately, and to her surprise, she succeeded. In order to prepare Xinran, who had learnt a little English, to study in a British school, Fangfang registered her at a summer camp there, whilst she herself registered to attend an intensive course at the same time as

a 'rehearsal' (I1²) for their subsequent year in the UK. During this period, Fangfang also found a house within walking distance of Xinran's school in order to enable her mother to drop off and pick up Xinran from school.

As a single mother and the only child of her widowed mother, Fangfang overcame many more difficulties than other typical Chinese students in implementing her plan of studying abroad, and further faced a more complicated life in the UK. In addition to the common challenges often faced by mature students, such as the difficulty of role switching and communication barriers with younger peers (Waller, 2006), Fangfang's life was more strongly influenced by her daughter. Although Xinran's daily life was largely supported by her grandmother, Xinran still had a strong demand for mother-daughter time. Accompanying Xinran occupied a lot of Fangfang's time, making her extremely selective about her participation in extracurricular activities.

I hardly participated in social activities. The golden time for adult socialising is 7 pm to 11 pm, but I could not invest this period in social events, because it is also the period for our mum-daughter interaction: listening to her experiences at school, playing with her, helping with her assignments sometimes, giving her a shower, and telling her stories before sleeping. These things could only start when I arrived home. So, it was impossible for me to go back home late. (I2³)

Having few opportunities to network was described by Fangfang as a regret, since one of her essential expectations in studying abroad was to find partners for her planned business. Nevertheless, it turned out that 'the majority of activities [she] attended were arranged by Xinran's school or those she could bring Xinran to' (I2), for example, visiting pony club (W4⁴), family swimming (W8), and participating in a drama festival (W5).

In addition, taking care of Xinran also impacted Fangfang's dedication to academic learning, especially after her mother and grandmother went back to China in March 2018 when their visitor visas expired, with the burden of looking after Xinran then falling entirely on her alone. Fangfang stated in her entries,

Mum and grandma have gone back to China and my cooking era is coming. That's horrible!!!! ... I have no more than 3 hours of studying time per day because I need to go shopping, cook, pick [Xinran] up, accompany her to play with her classmates after school ... I was so crazy that I brought me and my girl to a foreign country. (W5)

The caring burden increased when Xinran was on holiday (W8) or when Xinran was ill (W5), which required Fangfang to invest more time in her daughter rather than her academic work (see also Moreau and Kerner, 2015). She 'applied for the extension for almost every assignment in term two', as well as for her dissertation (W7; I2). Fangfang 'did not feel satisfied with [her] academic performance' but felt 'it was acceptable' (W9). Her 'expectation of academic improvement was

not that high' (I1), because she enrolled on her particular course for the purpose of 'setting her foot in this area as a businessperson, rather than an academic' (W9). More importantly, Fangfang realised that 'the most important thing for [her] overseas journey has unconsciously changed from self-improving to facilitating [her] daughter's growth' (I2).

In addition to impacting Fangfang's overseas experiences, caring responsibilities were also a non-negligible factor impacting Fangfang's post-graduation plan. When we held the first-round interview, Fangfang talked about her desire to do a PhD, which would be a way to stay in the UK for a longer time 'in case Xinran preferred to stay' (I1). Her PhD-related notes appeared frequently on her diaries for the first half-year. Fangfang also thought about other ways to extend their legal stay in Britain, for example applying for a Tier 1 visa as a graduate entrepreneur (W2) and finding a job in London (W8). However, these plans were not ultimately converted into any results. I followed this up in the second-round interview.

RESEARCHER: Are you still going to do a PhD?

FANGFANG: Maybe not. Xinran loves living here actually, but... If I do a PhD, I need a scholarship. No one can guarantee it. Also, there are too many difficulties in daily lives that can be foreseen. I just don't feel confident enough to face all of them.

RESEARCHER: When did you decide to give up the PhD plan?

FANGFANG: When my mum and grandma went back to China and I had to look after Xinran all by myself. I am bad at cooking. How poor Xinran was when she lost her dear grandma who was the best chef in the world in Xinran's eyes! It was just like a rehearsal for the PhD life. I felt it would be too difficult to bring Xinran up while doing a PhD. I cannot have my mum and grandma together with me for another four years considering the states of their health. It is too risky to keep them here without medical insurance. I cannot leave them in China either. So... no... (shrug her shoulders).

XUEMENG: How about the Tier 1 Graduate Entrepreneur Visa? You mentioned it in the second diary week.

FANGFANG: I searched for some information. The largest barrier is money. I told you before, I almost ran out of all my savings this year. Where can I get another £50,000 as the required start-up capital?

XUEMENG: You also mentioned a job in London.

FANGFANG: Yes. That was a position in a studying abroad agency. I thought about working here for one or two years, a bit shorter than a PhD, so that Xinran could receive a British education for longer. So, I applied for some jobs. You know I cannot do a busy job like in consulting companies. I need to take care of my daughter. However, light work means a low salary. I calculated the salary and expense in London. No, no way to stay there, especially because I still have a mortgage in China.

(I2)

The dialogue clearly shows that Fangfang's capability to stay in the UK was constrained by her caring responsibilities and associated financial problems. It seems

various resources (e.g. PhD opportunities, T1 visa, job vacancies) were accessible to Fangfang, but they would not actually enable Fangfang to live the life she most valued with regard to the constraints her status represented.

Accepting the reality of the situation, Fangfang decided to return to China. When we held the second-round interview online, she had taken Xinran back to China for primary school registration. Nevertheless, the decision to return did not end her difficulties in terms of her available choices. Fangfang was still struggling to choose a path for her career development. Despite the ten-year work experience in City B, Fangfang's (and Xinran's) *hukou* (China's household registration system) was still in their hometown (hereafter City T), a city around 80 miles from City B. Xinran could only be enrolled in a public primary school in City T because of the *hukou* restriction. On top of that, Fangfang believed that it would also be a better choice for her mother and grandmother to live in City T, where they can enjoy insurance and welfare provided by the local government. Fangfang therefore needed to work in City T if she wanted to take better care of all her dependents. However, this conflicted with her preferred direction for her career development, namely to 'join a well-developed arts-based English training institution in City B to acquire practical experience and accumulate related resources for [her] own business' (W6). Here, we again saw a negative impact of caring responsibilities on Fangfang's personal pursuits, which was exacerbated by the structural discourses (such as the policy of *hukou*, the unbalanced development of an industry) framing her ability to juggle various demands. Facing this dilemma, Fangfang emphasised her identity as the mother of her girl but also her identity as the only child of her mother.

I need to prioritise my family over my career. I have been thinking about this for a long time. Now I have persuaded myself around 70 or 80 per cent. My daughter is at an important stage of her growth. I cannot make her a 'left behind' child. She is poor enough to have a broken family without father's love. Although my mom is now physically capable to look after [Xinran], I don't want to exhaust my mom. She is already in her late 60s, and my grandma ... older. They need me... surely. I know it would be a shame to miss the business opportunity, but it would be a bigger shame if I am absent from my family. I am a mother, a daughter, a granddaughter. These are the jobs from which I can never resign.

(I2)

From the words 'persuade myself', we can see Fangfang's hesitation, which might be common among women who see good opportunities for career development but do not want to reject their caring responsibilities. The choice between 'a shame' and 'a bigger shame' in essence implies a loss of the real freedom of women in terms of their available choices, and they thus have to lower their expectations in accordance with the available opportunity. Compared to many typical Chinese international students, who stressed the independence that was facilitated by their overseas lives (Gu and Maley, 2008), Fangfang, by contrast, had a family life during her study year, which naturally led to a much greater consideration of the weight between family and career.

Discussion

Mother identity

As found by many studies (e.g. Archer et al., 2003; Brooks, 2013), a common motivation amongst student-parents to (re)enter university is to be a role model for their children, with student-mothers being more likely to make this claim than their male counterparts (Marandet and Wainwright, 2010). Fangfang, however, was not exactly in this position, as she was initially driven to study abroad by an entrepreneurship opportunity that was highly relevant to her career transition, which is an instrumental motivation for learning suggested by other research as less important for student-parents (Moreau and Kerner, 2015). Being able to take Xinran to the UK for one year of British life was almost an added benefit to Fangfang's international HE. Nevertheless, the decisive factor in Fangfang's studying abroad quickly changed when she realised that 'if [she] cannot take [her] girl together, [she] will give the study-abroad plan up'. During the complex process of the visa application, Fangfang had, perhaps unconsciously, began to think more highly of Xinran's opportunity to study in the UK than her own. This change in motivation explains why Fangfang always firmly chose to prioritise her daughter's needs when faced the conflict between her caring responsibilities and the academic (and other) pursuits associated with studying abroad.

In concert with student-mothers in other studies (e.g. Brooks, 2013; Danna Lynch, 2008; Stone and O'Shea, 2013), Fangfang indeed experienced time-related difficulties. As a mature student returning to education after a lengthy gap in learning and an international student studying in a foreign country for the first time, Fangfang needed to dedicate substantial time to her academic and acculturative adaptation (Yeh and Inose, 2003). In parallel, as a single mother and the only carer for two elders, Fangfang had to respond to the time demands made by her family, even though her mother, in turn, shared a significant proportion of Fangfang's caring responsibilities with regard to Xinran. Fangfang realised the conflict between meeting the needs of academia and the family that of both being 'greedy institutions' (Coser, 1974), at the very beginning of her overseas HE, and then chose to spend more time on her family, especially on Xinran, in terms of not only looking after her but also enriching her experiences as much as possible. Fangfang therefore adapted her academic goals to be those of 'completing compulsory tasks and getting the degree' (I2) which were then proving to be difficult enough in her case anyway. As for Fangfang's expectation of building up effective networks for her potential entrepreneurship pertaining to arts-based English training, this was barely realised. Chiming with Stone and O'Shea (2013), Fangfang's social/leisure time was virtually non-existent, except when integrated with child-care activities such as getting familiar with Xinran's English teacher and getting to know some professionals when accompanying Xinran to attend the drama festival organised by her school.

Non-compliance with their multiple commitments often leads to student-parents feeling guilt about each identity. As Moreau and Kerner (2015) argued, student carers felt that their insufficient dedication to their dependents and to their studies ruled them out of culturally recognised motherhood and of the default

portrait of the carefree studentship. In Fangfang's case, she confessed feeling a little guilt for pursuing overseas HE but more so with regard to her daughter's unmet needs, even though she had greatly prioritised her caring responsibilities over her academic learning and, indeed, any other activities. This highlights the ideas that a student-mother's carer identity is somehow 'ideological' – women are deservedly supposed to nurture children and others (Acker, 2012). Care being a series of strongly gendered practices out of women's 'natural desire' (Feree, 1990, p. 876) and with 'deep moral connotations' (Grummell et al., 2009, p. 194). These characteristics of care were amplified in the case of Fangfang, a Chinese single mother on whom a sense of guilt regarding her child is culturally imposed for giving the child a 'broken family' (Gao, 2009).

As missed in previous literature but revealed by the present study, the impacts of caring responsibilities extended to international student carers' post-graduation plans. Fangfang considered various ways to extend both her and Xinran's stay in the UK since Xinran expressed a preference to do so. However, negotiating caring responsibilities during either a PhD study or employment (including entrepreneurship) in a foreign country would have been too difficult for a student-mother who would have to bear the pressure of care, study/employment, finance and concern about aging relatives at the same time (Brooks, 2013). Fangfang had no choice but to take Xinran back to China. Facing a conflict between pursuing a better career prospect in a more developed city and seeking a relatively easy job in her hometown so as to take better care of Xinran, Fangfang chose the latter as she could not afford the huge shame of neglecting her daughter's growth. Fangfang's decision reflected a long-standing construction of motherhood, namely that mothers undoubtably need to invest considerable time, energy and emotion in their children, even at the cost of self-sacrifice (Arendell, 2000). Moreover, it is not enough for Fangfang to fulfil the duties of a mother as a good 'homemaker'; she is also the 'breadwinner' of her family (Smith, 1996, p. 68). Single mothers thus cannot fully sacrifice their careers to family but instead, in accord with Gao (2009), they are expected to succeed in balancing the needs of both sides of their lives. Single mothers' well-being is therefore at high risk due to the associated material and mental pressures (Li, 2008).

Intergenerational support

In Fangfang's story, her mother (pseudonym, Guiying) played a salient role, as she was the main provider of support for Fangfang in taking care of Xinran, whilst at the same time also being one of Fangfang's main dependents, and whose reliance on Fangfang might well increase as she gets older. Guiying had helped Fangfang with childcare since Xinran was born and invested even more in Xinran after Fangfang's divorce. Grandparents providing care for grandchildren is quite prevalent in China. Culturally speaking, parents typically prefer to support their adult children's childcare to facilitate intergenerational exchanges and the collective well-being of extended families (Lou and Chi, 2012). For the one-child-policy generation with the 'four-two-one' family structure (four grandparents, two parents and one child), grandparents are more likely to participate in the care of

grandchildren so as to alleviate their adult children's heavy burden to support their own family as well as the two extended families from both care and financial perspectives (Sheng and Settles, 2006). In Fangfang's case, in contrast to many international student carers who were troubled by being unable to access to extended family for help (Brooks, 2015; Loveridge et al., 2018), Fangfang received crucial support from Guiying in terms of dropping off and picking up Xinran from school, cooking, and many other household chores during Guiying's half-year tourist-visa-permitted stay in the UK. Their settling in and adaptation to overseas life were thus greatly facilitated.

However, Guiying's support could never have represented a long-term solution for Fangfang in terms of the conflict between Fangfang's carer role and her other roles; on the contrary, foreseeably, Guiying would have exacerbated Fangfang's caring responsibilities as time passed. When Fangfang was considering whether to extend her and Xinran's stay in the UK, as well as the geographic destination of her employment, Guiying was regarded more as a dependent to be looked after rather than a supporter who could share Fangfang's caring responsibilities, let alone Guiying's mother also requiring immediate care from Guiying and Fangfang. Chinese culture emphasises filial piety, with *fanbu* (反哺, regurgitation-feeding) being an important concept prescribing adult children's duties with regard to taking care of their elderly parents (Yi and Chang, 2008). The One Child Policy intensifies the intergenerational dependence as the single child is the only person who can provide his/her elderly parents with care, regardless of whether this is from a physical, financial or emotional perspective. Influenced by this, family union was suggested as a key factor in driving Chinese international students to return to China after completing their studies (Centre for China and Globalization, 2017). Moreover, it is not rare for parents to be an important factor when Chinese students are considering the location of their employment: they either want to work in the hometown where their parents live, or they want to take their parents to the city where they will work someday so as to fulfil their duties with regard to taking care of their parents without completely sacrificing their careers (Cao, 2020). There are inevitably many compromises relating to family-career decisions for Chinese people in the one-child-policy generation, and the situation can be more of a struggle for people like Fangfang with an unusual family structure, which in this instance involved her in a linear, gendered caring chain.

Concluding thoughts

Student carers, international student carers in particular, are essentially invisible in both academic research and institutional data. Family mobility to support the international HE of a parent has received little attention from scholars, and almost all the literature I was able to obtain suggested that there were no data about the number or characteristics of the student carer population collected by the sampled universities (e.g. Brooks, 2015; Marandet and Wainwright, 2010; Moreau and Kerner, 2015). This lack of information about the features and experiences of international student carers hampers the formulation of policies that might otherwise empower international students' (and their accompanying dependents') lives

in their host countries (Doyle et al., 2016). This chapter is based on the narratives of one Chinese student carer, Fangfang, who was accompanied by her daughter, mother and mother's mother whilst studying in the UK, and has discussed how caring responsibilities impacted Fangfang's decision about studying abroad, experiences of overseas learning and living, and post-graduation career plan. It has been found that the decisive factor in Fangfang's choice to study abroad quickly changed to one of enabling her daughter's overseas experience, though she was initially motivated by her career development. During her overseas year, Fangfang juggled the time demands associated with caring for her daughter, pursuing her studies and building valued networks, although her mother provided her with significant support with regard to childcare. Facing the 'discordant times' (Moss, 2004), Fangfang's mother identity drove her to prioritise her daughter's needs over her own pursuits so that she adapted her learning and network expectations to a lower level than her initial goals. Fangfang's wider caring responsibilities (including towards her daughter, mother and grandmother) further shaped her decisions on whether to stay in the UK for a longer time and where to progress her career, resulting in her compromising a better career opportunity to fulfil her duties with regard to taking care of all her dependents. This chapter therefore argues that caring responsibilities, in some cases, can bring about women's self-sacrifice in their personal pursuits to satisfy their family's and extended family's collective well-being, with cultural value (e.g. filial piety), structural factors (e.g. *hukou*, one-child policy) and personal circumstance (e.g. as a single parent), being likely to intensify the conflict between Chinese women's personal development and family duties.

While many countries have taken action to encourage non-traditional students to engage in HE, what is worth more attention is the transformation of HE into a more sympathetic and inclusive space where feasible measures can always be introduced to assist non-traditional students in dealing with the particular problems they might experience (McGivney, 2003). International student carers constitute an obscure subgroup of international students, and they have a more marginalised status among the entire student cohort. Before discussing how to better support international student carers, we first need to make them more visible. International students are not a homogeneous group. International student carers need to be distinguished from typical international students, and their circumstances and specific needs are expected to be explicitly understood. Universities therefore need to collect data from international (and domestic) student carers in terms of their characteristics, including but not necessarily limited to: how many children they have, how old their children are, whether they have partner or other supporters for caring responsibilities, whether they have other caring responsibilities in addition to childcare, whether they have arranged proper childcare facilities and whether there is any help do they need from the institution. Universities should be more proactive in offering useful information and support to their international student carers, considering some of them may be not aware that some university services are available to them. Moreover, university staff need to be more empathetic towards the difficulties that international student carers may face in balancing priorities among their academic learning, caring duties, sociocultural adaptation and other personal goals. When formulating policies and arranging activities (both

academic and social), the group of international student carers should be taken into particular consideration in terms of their competing time commitments and relevant mental stress. Although as shown in the discussion section the conflict between care and other aspects of people's life is somehow culturally and structurally framed, universities are expected to empower international student carers with more space and capabilities to balance their dual roles and realise the goals they have reason to value.

Notes

- 1 International mature students: the categorisations of 'international students' and 'mature students' vary across countries and contexts. In the Chinese context, international students refer to students who receive education and achieve degrees from foreign countries. There was no unanimous definition for mature students in China. In general, Chinese students start undergraduate studies at around 18 and postgraduate studies at around 22 if they had no gap during their education trajectories.
- 2 I1: refers to the first-round interview.
- 3 I2: refers to the second-round interview.
- 4 W4: refers to week four of her diary.

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9 Doctoral carers

Tracing contradictory discourses and identifying possibilities for a more *care-full* doctoral education

James Burford and Cat Mitchell

Introduction: widening participation and the category of ‘doctoral carers’

Over the past several decades there has been a growing concern to extend widening participation agendas to the doctoral level (McCulloch and Thomas, 2013). Efforts at widening participation have intensified due to increasing concern about inequalities surrounding access, participation, retention and success within post-graduate education (Grant-Smith et al., 2020). In particular, scholars have drawn attention to inequalities with regard to social class (Wakeling, 2005) and ethnic background (Wakeling, 2009). There has also been scholarship that has explored concerns for indigenous students, students with a disability, students from non-English-speaking backgrounds and those from regional and remote areas (Grant-Smith et al., 2020), among other intersecting categories of difference (see Burford and Mitchell, 2019).

Across debates about widening participation in higher education (HE), there has also been increasing recognition of ‘care’ as a key dimension shaping the student experience, and ‘carers’ as a category of student who face particular challenges in accessing, participating and succeeding in higher study (Andrewartha and Harvey, 2021; Brooks, 2012; Moreau, 2016). While Carers Australia (the national body representing Australia’s unpaid carers) defines carers as ‘people who provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends who have a disability, mental illness, chronic condition, terminal illness, an alcohol or other drug issue or who are frail aged’ (Carers Australia, 2021, para. 1), our use of the concept encompasses a wider array of carers, including the guardians of children and young people. As a result of this increasing attention, there has also been a growth of institutional equity and diversity policies to address carer’s needs, including specific equity policies and initiatives for staff and student carers (e.g. supporting staff with caring responsibilities, La Trobe University, 2021). Across the literature on student carers’ experiences, researchers have sought to problematise the ‘default construction of the university student as carefree’ (Moreau and Kerner, 2015, p. 215). Previous studies have argued that the category of ‘student carer’ is often particularly salient at the doctoral level, given that many doctoral students are older, and are more likely than younger peers to have caring responsibilities for dependent children (Brooks, 2012).

Growing interest in doctoral carers is visible in recently published work, which has homed in on their experiences (Henderson and Moreau, 2020; Hook, 2016; Kelly, 2017; Rahman, 2015; Wladkowski and Mirick, 2020), including numerous autoethnographic pieces written by former and current doctoral carers (e.g. Abdellatif and Gatto, 2020; Burford and Hook, 2019; Lipton, 2019). To date, much of the literature at the intersection of doctoral education and care has focused on care for children (see Abdellatif and Gatto, 2020; Danna Lynch, 2008; Wladkowski and Mirick, 2020). However, there have also been accounts of doctoral students who care for parents and other family members (e.g. Burford and Hook, 2019; Maher et al., 2004). Given the gendered nature of care responsibilities, much of the focus has been on women carers, particularly mothers. However, there has been a small growth in interest in the experiences of doctoral carers who are not women (Burford and Hook, 2019), and intersectional work which examines doctoral care across a complex matrix of identities and axes of advantage/disadvantage (Abdellatif and Gatto, 2020).

Across the literature on graduate students with care responsibilities, scholars have identified how the designation of care as out of time/place can produce significant inequalities, such as higher risks of attrition. For example, Danna Lynch (2008) found that graduate student-mothers had significant economic difficulties (including stipends running out, high debts and reliance on family or a spouse); challenges accessing affordable childcare (high costs of university childcare or challenges with class schedules); and difficulties negotiating the dual identities of 'mother' and 'student', sometimes downplaying one or other identity. As Danna Lynch (2008) argues, the 'symbolic nature of both roles – mother and student – is often in conflict with the structural elements around which each role is performed' (p. 585). Importantly, researchers have also considered the multidimensional nature of care responsibilities and the benefits associated with the dual status of student carers (Moreau and Kerner, 2015). As Aitchison and Mowbray (2013) point out, while care responsibilities can bring stress and complexity to the life of a doctoral student, they can also provide solace, purpose and joy. Indeed, the emotional complexity of balancing care work and study can provide a sense of agency and strength.

'Care' is increasingly viewed as an equity concern for doctoral students in the public sphere too, with a growth of online articles (e.g. Mantai, 2017) and blog posts (e.g. Loane, 2014; Mason, 2009; Turvill, 2014). Social media has been a key space where issues surrounding doctoral carers have been discussed, including online fora such as PostgradForum as well as the communities that build around Twitter handles such as @parent_phd and hashtags like #PhDparent, #PhDparenting and #PhDMom. Online groups have arisen, such as the *PhD and Early Career Researcher Parents* group on Facebook (see Carr and Veazey, 2017), which has spawned its own virtual 'Shut up and Write' initiative (McChesney, 2017). Across these public accounts, much of the discussion foregrounds the challenges of balancing work and life and often offers practical tools such as time management strategies and advice for communicating with family members (Govaerts and Saez, 2020). While sometimes these debates are framed as structural and ideological, often a discourse of individualisation prevails (Moreau and Kerner, 2015).

A recent example of public debate about doctoral carers was sparked by the ‘Pandemic PGRs’, a group formed in April 2020 in response to perceptions of a lack of support from UK Research and Innovation (UKRI, a key funder of doctoral research in the UK) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Pandemic PGRs released a report titled ‘Falling Short’ (Munro and Heath, 2021), which argued that insufficient support had been provided for parents and other carers during the pandemic. The report details the significant disruptions that many doctoral parents have negotiated during COVID-19, noting that ‘for many it has been simply impossible to maintain a ‘normal’ work pattern for their PhD, given changed or increased responsibilities’ (Munro and Heath, 2021, p. 34). Despite these disruptions, the Pandemic PGRs document how the UKRI has failed to recognise ‘time lost’ as a legitimate reason for granting extensions, and argue that this ‘gives the message that parents and those with caring responsibilities have no right to pursue a PhD’ (Munro and Heath, 2021, p. 34). Given the uptick in interest in student carers in HE more generally, and specific calls to make doctoral education more accessible for carers, we think that it is timely to enquire more deeply into the ways that carers are positioned in doctoral education, and how the relationship between the doctorate and care may be otherwise imagined.

In order to contribute to these ongoing conversations about doctoral carers, we closely consider two visual artefacts and supporting diary-interview data, which speak to one student’s experience of doctoral parenthood. In our reading of the visual data, we interrogate the gendered politics of care and doctoral education, identifying how *doctoral student-mothers* can be positioned between competing expectations of ‘intensive mothering’ on the one hand, and ‘unencumbered’ devotion to doctoral study on the other. In this chapter, we pay particular attention to the exclusions that result from positioning the student carer as a ‘non-ideal’ form of doctoral subjectivity (Aitchison and Mowbray, 2013; Johnson et al., 2000; Leonard, 2001). Following on from this analysis, we then consider the possibilities that may arise from attending more closely to the concept of care in doctoral education. By drawing on the work of philosophers of education (Barnacle, 2018; Noddings, 2001, 2005, 2009), we examine how ‘care’ may be configured as a concept that is foundational (rather than peripheral) to contemporary doctoral curricula.

The study and participants: the Uneasy Feelings project

Data considered in this chapter were generated as a part of a wider study called *Uneasy Feelings: Queer(y)ing the affective-politics of doctoral education*, which explored how political phenomena (e.g. increasing neoliberalism, audit culture and intensification) shape the felt experience of doctoral education in the 21st century (Burford, 2016). The wider project involved a multipronged research design comprising: (1) the analysis of cultural texts; (2) autoethnographic inquiry; and (3) a qualitative study with ten participants, all of whom were doctoral students enrolled in either Arts or Education disciplines.¹ The data considered in this chapter are confined to the qualitative study.

Data collection took place at a research-intensive university in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2013. The qualitative study involved two interconnected phases of data

collection. The first was diary-interview technique (see Burford, 2021), which involved a period of independent diary-based data collection and a follow-up semi-structured interview. Participants were encouraged to record details about their doctoral experience. The second set of methods was conducted at a three-day residential retreat held north of Auckland. The retreat mirrored aspects of the design of Grant's (2008) *Women Writing Away* retreat model with the addition of arts-based research activities and digitally recorded group discussions.

Reading across the words (generated via diary-interview and retreat discussions) and images (generated via arts-based retreat activities), we became attentive to moments in the dataset where participants spoke about themselves as carers, or their desires to have, delay, or not have children. Given the affective-political framework of the wider study, we were particularly interested in forming a sense of the political forces that shape the conditions for doctoral carers, as well as the felt experience of being a doctoral student negotiating caring responsibilities. Across the dataset there were numerous accounts relevant to developing such an analysis, including a student who was currently pregnant, a student who spoke about their decision not to have children and a student who was hoping to start a family if she could secure academic work (and maternity leave entitlements) post-graduation. However, as analysts we felt our attention being tugged towards data produced by one participant, who we will call 'Gertie', who was a part-time doctoral student studying in a faculty of arts. To borrow the words of MacLure, Gertie's data began to 'glow' (2013, p. 661) the more we looked, arresting 'the listless traverse of our attention across the surface of the screen ... intensifying our gaze and making us pause to burrow inside it, mining it for meaning' (MacLure, 2010, p. 282). While our initial *frisson* was with the two self-portraits which are the centrepiece of our enquiry in this chapter (see overleaf), we also found that there was a large amount of narrative material across Gertie's diary-interview data which could enable a nuanced consideration of her experience of being a doctoral carer. Gertie is a Pākehā woman, and at the time of our interview, she was in her early 50s. Gertie was doing her PhD in the humanities and was the mother of two young adult daughters. Gertie did not live with her daughters at the time, but she was engaged in significant caring responsibilities for her children. Gertie also had enduring Power of Attorney for Care and Welfare for a friend who has dementia and is in full-time care. Gertie visited this person weekly and arranged health appointments for them. While the consideration of one case does not enable us to make general statements, the discourses we interpret across Gertie's account do enable us to explore the social construction of doctoral carers in rich detail.

We want to issue a couple of caveats before proceeding with our discussion. The first is that our goal has not been to discern what the texts (whether visual, verbal or written data) 'really' signify. The interpretations we offer in this chapter are just some of many possible meanings that could be identified. The second is to recall that the images we are analysing were produced in a particular time and place (e.g. at a writing retreat away from 'normal' domestic routines), with a particular audience (e.g. of a researcher and other doctoral students). This context will have inevitably shaped the kinds of images students produced, and the ways they spoke about them in the group discussions that followed.

A care-free woman in a room of her own or a stressed-out octopus on wheels? The conflicted discursive space of doctoral-motherhood

During the writing retreat held as part of this study, nine doctoral students were invited to select a piece of paper and fold it in half. Students were given a mix of arts supplies, including markers, crayons and pastels, scissors, magazines and newspapers, glue and Sellotape and university materials (e.g. promotional pamphlets). On one side of the paper, students were invited to create a representation of their 'real' doctoral experience, and on the other, students were asked to draw their 'ideal' view of doctoral study. Many students interpreted these instructions as an invitation to draw two self-portraits; however, some created more abstract images filled with objects or landscapes. Gertie produced the following picture (see Figures 9.1–9.3) and introduced it to other students seated around a table, while a researcher present

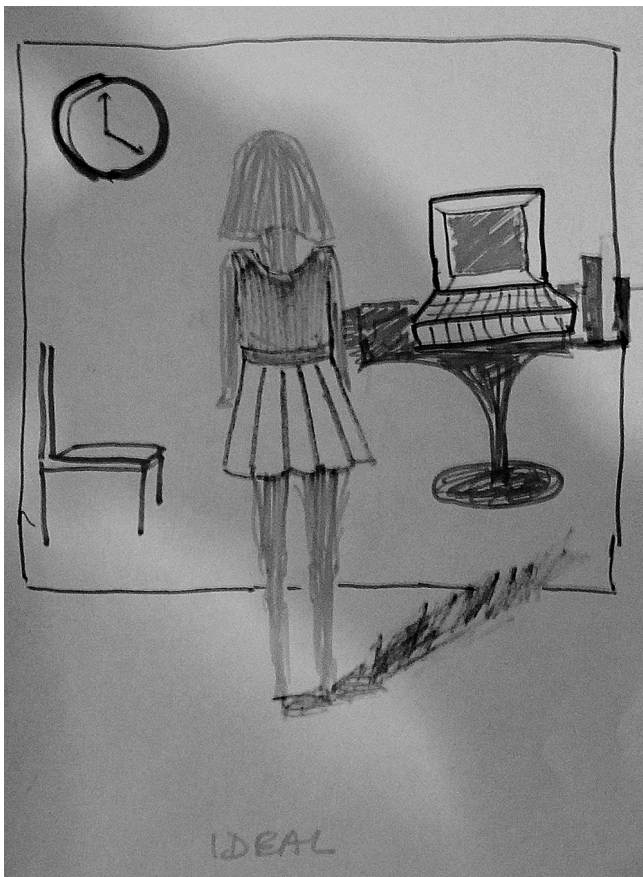


Figure 9.1 In this image a woman stands with her back to the viewer. She looks into an office with a clock, an empty chair and a desk with a computer and some books on it. This image is of her 'ideal' doctoral experience.

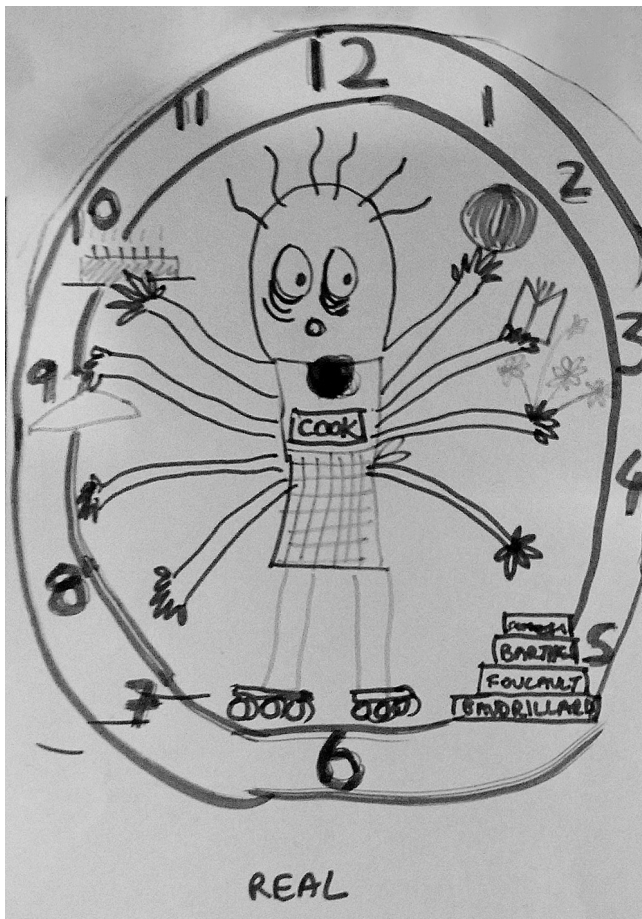


Figure 9.2 In this image an octopus-like creature with a worried expression is inside a clock and juggling a number of domestic objects while wearing roller skates. At the bottom of the image is the word 'real'.

took notes. Gertie later consented for the image to be collected for future analysis. We will begin by analysing the right-hand side of the image, Gertie's 'ideal' picture of doctoral study (Figure 9.1).

In Gertie's representation of her ideal doctoral experience, we see an image of a woman standing with her back to the viewer, poised to cross the threshold of a study or office space. Inside the room are three main elements: an empty chair in the left corner, a small clock on the wall and a desk with a computer and some books. Gertie is alone, and the room is characterised by an absence of clutter and activity. As she is facing away from the viewer, we are unable to access much information about Gertie's affective state. Yet, to us she appears to be a doctoral woman positioned to create and think in solitude. Indeed, the chair to the left in the image is located away from the desk as if to invite such contemplation.

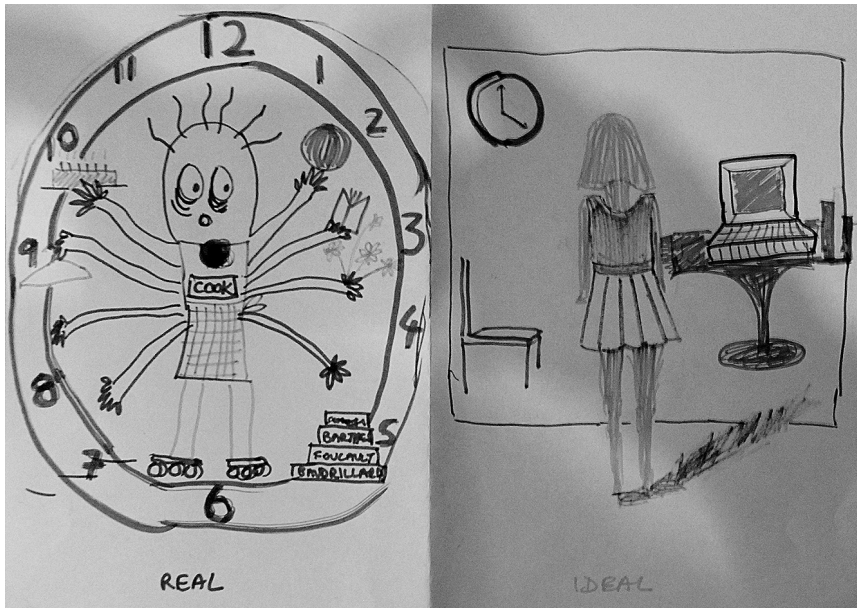


Figure 9.3 This image presents both the ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ images side by side.

Two key ideas stand out as we respond to Figure 9.1. First, we note that the image evokes the ‘individual’ doctoral candidate unencumbered by care. Doctoral education researchers have argued that for much of the 20th century, doctoral education was configured around the ideal of the autonomous and independent scholar (Johnson et al., 2000). Given the inaccessibility of doctoral education during this period and its student demographic characteristics in the Global North (mostly elite, white, men), this doctoral figure was also imagined as separate from the ‘feminine’ characteristic of human dependency (Johnson et al., 2000). While the decades since the heyday of this figure have seen widening participation, the fantasy of the ‘autonomous and independent doctoral scholar’ persists. Research with mature students in the UK has argued that dominant discourses within HE continue to frame the ‘ideal learner’ in very limited, often masculinist terms. As Leathwood and O’Connell (2003) point out, this figure is ‘male, white, middle class and able-bodied ... an autonomous individual, unencumbered by domestic responsibility, poverty or self-doubt’ (p. 599, see also Ruddick, 1996). Indeed, given ongoing neoliberal reforms to HE, there are concerns that scholars are increasingly constituted as competitive individuals who are ideally ‘unencumbered’ by care (Blackmore, 2020; Lynch, 2010). In Gertie’s ideal image there is no discernible presence of reproductive labour (Lipton, 2019). Instead, Gertie’s idealised self is positioned to conform to what Currie et al. (2000) describe as a ‘peak masculinist discourse’ (one that operates from the top of the organisation) which ‘presumes a singularity of purpose that parenting and partnership does not always allow’ (Williams, 2000, n.p.). Within this picture of the ‘ideal’ PhD care labour has been minimised.

In Gertie's image we also find striking resonances with Virginia Woolf's² (1981) idea of 'a room of one's own'. Woolf's groundbreaking extended essay argued for the necessity for women to have both a space to write in and the material resources to enable women to occupy that space and do the critical work of thinking and writing. Given the significance of *A Room of One's Own* as 'a classic in the history of western feminism' (Gubar, 2005, p. xxvi), scholars have written at length about Woolf's text, with many highlighting the centrality of these conditions of possibility for women to be able to take up writerly (or indeed, scholarly) identities. Indeed, across doctoral education work on care and gender this reference often surfaces (e.g. Burford and Hook, 2019; Detore-Nakamura, 2003; Kelly, 2017). As others have noted, Woolf positions the confined space of one's own interior room as a site of freedom and liberation from spaces dominated by men (Sheikh, 2018). In our reading of Gertie's image and her diary-interview data, the room appears to represent an ideal doctoral experience which makes absent caring demands, outside of her care for her academic work. The idea of retreat, and the practice of retreating as part of the research, appeared to be meaningful for Gertie:

It [the writing retreat] was just a very nice space to be in, to think about, you know how I had become stuck in a bit of a rut ... I found it very difficult to in my home context explain what writing is, and you know the conditions for which it may happen ... And um, but I found it very ... useful to be in this sleeping, eating, waking, and thinking all the time about that, and not about anything else. So, that's all I really feel, like I made a bit of a breakthrough.

Here, Gertie speaks of the value of focused time, the conditions that facilitate this, and how they facilitate her 'breakthrough'. Later in her diary again we see another reference to Gertie's joy in taking away from her other responsibilities to focus on her work:

I feel that this weekend [the retreat] has been a most amazing luxury – dedicated time which has given me some insight into how I work best as a writer. What I feel is that I have gone down into a deep well which is the writing process, and I have now emerged with a different perspective.

In this passage we also note Gertie invoking her writer-self identity. In this sense there are broad linkages with the critical elements of space (and time) for a woman to write as articulated by Virginia Woolf. Gertie imagines herself in a space of solitude and focus. She presents these as the ideal doctoral conditions; however, for her they are largely a luxury that she can rarely access given the multiple conflicting demands she encounters as a busy doctoral student-mother.

In her second image, Gertie has represented her 'real' doctoral self as an exhausted octopus on roller-skates, who is contained inside an enormous clock. Her hair is standing on end, her eyes have dark circles under them and her mouth has a worried expression, as if to say 'uh-oh'. It is with her many arms that Gertie tries to balance a clothes hanger, a birthday cake, a netball, a book and flowers. She holds all these objects at the same time as wearing roller skates which may help her

scoot between activities at the same time as they threaten to up-end her. The fullness of her home life leaves little room to engage with the books of French theorists (including Barthes, Foucault, Baudrillard) that are piled at her feet. As a part-time mature student returning to study, Gertie is particularly anxious that she has time to ‘catch up’ with all the reading she has missed in her time away from HE. She describes herself as ‘behind on the reading, you know what I mean? Like a decade of reading could have been going on’.

We interpret the clock, multiple arms and exhaustion visible on Gertie’s face as evidence of the challenges of managing care responsibilities, in addition to meeting the new expectations of the intensified doctorate (e.g. greater expectations of degree timeliness, and heightened expectations of scholarly publishing). As we already know, the academic job market is competitive, so publication during candidacy has emerged ‘as the best known bet to secure a permanent academic position’ (Burford, 2014, p. 69). Gertie was already publishing at the time of our interview but was aware that she would need to ‘ramp up all of that’. However, Gertie struggled to make time for her thesis. She was able to write before starting work for the day and less frequently in the weekends, which involved ‘taking the girls to netball practice and fifteen thousand other things’. As Shahjahan (2015) has argued, in the neoliberal academy time has colonised the body. This seems to have taken literal form in Gertie’s image.

Within Gertie’s ‘real’ image we can also read a discourse of ‘intensive mothering’, for instance, if we look closely at the apron and ‘cook’ sign on Gertie’s chest as well as the domestic responsibilities of gardening, sports, washing and birthday parties that are indexed by the objects in her hands. As Hillier (2020) argues, intensive mothering discourses are ‘premised on the notion that mothering requires an abundance of time, energy and resources ... [and] maintain the idea that in order to be an effective mother, one must invest plentiful amounts of face time, money and enriching activities’ (para. 1). Mothers who cannot practice intensive mothering are frequently deemed inadequate and may experience significant maternal guilt (Detore-Nakamura, 2003; Hillier, 2020). As Hillier (2020) notes, this notion of guilt often revolves around ‘notions of perfection and standards that are unattainable’ (para. 1). This unattainability is arguably manifested in the image, through Gertie’s transformation into an octopus-like creature who can juggle multiple tasks simultaneously.

Doctoral student-mother: complex and contradictory discourses

When we consider both images side-by-side a stark contrast emerges. In Figure 9.3, we can discern the legacy of Cartesian logics, where thought and rationality are separated (Lynch, 2010) and, indeed, elevated from feeling. The image on the right-hand side of the figure, which represents Gertie’s ideal doctoral experience, invokes the discourse of the doctoral scholar unencumbered by care responsibilities, whereas the image on the left seems much more focused on heightened emotions tied to a hectic and overloaded domestic sphere. In this sense, we identify a reproduction of a binary divide between thought-rationality and care-emotions, a division marked by the fold in the centre of the page. This divide is firmly

rooted in gender relations which locate care and emotions as lesser, and feminine in nature, compared to the 'higher' domains of the masculine individual thinker-scholar (Johnson et al., 2000).

These binary divisions can produce significant identity conflict for doctoral mothers. For example, Wall (2008) describes choices doctoral women make *between* 'head' and 'heart', and for some participants in Aitchison and Mowbray's (2013) study, the emotional demands of family relationships sparked intense feelings where students found *combining* their care responsibilities and the demands of doctoral work overwhelming. This sense of being overwhelmed is clear in Gertie's 'real' image and also was evident in her diary entries, where she initially takes responsibility for the intensity of her life, before setting it in a wider context of an 'avalanche of responsibility':

If I was a more structured and organised person, I could work to plan a bit better, but although I develop plans, my life is so chaotic with family and work demands that I often feel an avalanche of responsibility for things which have to come first before the thesis.

The constructions of the ideal doctoral student are often internalised by those who are positioned as 'other' within the discourse (Read et al., 2003). We wonder if this helps us understand the interplay between the two figures. In Figure 9.2, we interpret Gertie being pulled between the discourses of 'intensive mothering' the 'doctoral student devoted to study'. Arguably, this conflict produces significant affective strain, with the possibility that Gertie may fail to achieve recognition as the ideal 'doctoral student' because of her caring responsibilities as well as idealised notions of mothering because of her doctoral student identity and commitments. As Springer et al. (2009) argue, 'unrealistic yet normative conceptions of "idealized" mothers and "100 per cent" academics mean that one can never truly be both' (p. 436). Gertie's image in Figure 9.2 seems to suggest that containing both identities within one body simultaneously may feel impossible.

Indeed, the discourses of 'intensive mothering' and 'the autonomous and unencumbered doctoral candidate' appear to be so incompatible as to almost stretch Gertie's body to breaking point in Figure 9.2. Arguably, this leads to a symbolic transformation of Gertie from a human into a non- or super-human form to accommodate these multiple demands. Gertie's transformation into an octopus-like creature (it is worth noting that Gertie draws herself with ten limbs!) chimes with previous studies which have described doctoral women who 'squashed it all in ... I felt really stretched from just being a mum and having a full-time job and a PhD' (Brown and Watson, 2010, p. 395). It also extends representations of 'juggling' simultaneous demands of home and study that many doctoral women note (Brown and Watson, 2010, p. 395). Perhaps, in Gertie's octopus we can also see echoes of the 'Super-scholar' idea articulated in Claire Aitchison and Susan Mowbray's (2013) study of doctoral women, a kind of creature which is beyond the human.

Another theme that we notice as we read the two images is 'time'. In Figure 9.1, Gertie's world is not defined or circumscribed by the oversized clock that encircles

her in her representation of her real doctoral experience (Figure 9.2); instead, the clock is decentred and significantly diminished in size. We wonder to what extent the ‘idealised’ version of her doctoral self is anachronous or chronologically misplaced. To our reading, the doctorate that is being idealised by Gertie may be a less intensive version than the one that many doctoral students of today experience; with high expectations of timeliness, audit, intensified expectations on written outputs and a more managed doctoral experience overall. As Shahjahan (2015) argues, ‘the multiplying and endless academic tasks – countless forms of assessments and a hyped up productivity schedule – engendered through neoliberal reforms propagate an ever-present “scarcity of time” affectively and cognitively’ (p. 491). Within this scarce time the ‘good academic citizen’ of the neoliberal academy is supposed to ‘accumulate grants, publications, and patents, as well as to improve teaching evaluations, and structure service commitments’ (Shahjahan, 2015, p. 492). It is no wonder that Gertie looks exhausted. But these temporalities ‘may have especially exclusionary effects on particular bodies and selves’ (Shahjahan, 2015, p. 492). In a context where ‘hyper-competition and individualism tied to neoliberal logic constructs a hierarchy regarding the allocation of time’ (Shahjahan, 2015, p. 492) and the ‘best’ things to do are ‘those that advance one’s career and economic survival’ (Shahjahan, 2015, p. 492), these objects prompt questions about the time pressures on doctoral parents (Hook, 2016; Moreau and Kerner, 2015), and the probability that such time pressures may be unequally gendered (Acker and Armenti, 2004; Hey, 2001; Maher et al., 2004; Wall, 2008).

Despite the binary configuration of care/scholarship revealed in these visual texts, we know that counter-discourses are possible (Moreau and Kerner, 2015). It is also important to emphasise that care and doctoral education are multifaceted. While caring responsibilities may add complexity to navigating the doctorate, caring relations also provide doctoral students with solace and sustenance. Arguably, being a carer, or oriented to care, can also shape how students approach research and what it is to be a doctoral student. It is into the capacities of care and its connection with doctoral education that we head next. We identify a need for a wider theorisation of doctoral care, and the place of caregiving within that wider theorisation.

Conceptualising *care-full* doctoral education

The case study at the heart of this chapter has drawn attention to normative figurations of care and care responsibilities within doctoral education. So far in our chapter, we have explored how the role of ‘doctoral carer’ may sit uneasily in relation to idealised understandings of the *unencumbered scholar* engaged in doctoral education. Gertie’s image demonstrates how care responsibilities may be positioned as largely being out-of-place when it comes to navigating the doctorate. It is here we ask: what if we imagined doctoral education where care and caring responsibilities were not pushed to the margins? How else might the doctoral ‘picture’ be drawn?

To think about these questions more deeply we have read the work of doctoral education scholars who have explored the importance of care in doctoral education (e.g. Aitchison and Mowbray, 2013). These scholars argue that it is possible to

move beyond thinking about care in terms of discourses of exclusion and accommodation, instead sketching a vision of care which is productive and valuable. As Aitchison and Mowbray (2013) argue, we can also think about doctoral education alongside more collaborative and relational modes of knowledge production that are increasingly desired within the world of research. The authors argue that we may need to extend beyond simply accommodating different ways of being in the university (e.g. more care-full ways) – and more appropriately recognise the value of capacities that have been historically gendered feminine, such as collaboration, interdependence and the appreciation of others' capacities.

Similarly, Robin Barnacle (2018) and Nel Noddings (2001, 2005, 2009) invite us to think about a 'care-full PhD' (Barnacle, 2018). Noddings and Barnacle identify the potential value of thinking about care as a concept which could help researchers think more expansively about the role and purposes of the doctorate. For Barnacle, thinking through a 'care' lens enables a focus on doctoral education as a means to care for others, things and thought. Moreover, the notion of care-fully oriented thought and a care-fully oriented doctorate 'highlights the need to direct thinking toward a more just and caring world' (p. 85). As Barnacle (2018) reminds us, the concept of care in doctoral education is not new; much of what might be considered to be standard doctoral pedagogy, in general terms, is focused on providing guidance to doctoral students about what they should care for and about, for example, research methods, research ethics, writing and publication as well as the needs of potential end users of research and national economic and social issues. However, as Barnacle explains, much of the attention given to care and doctoral work is tied to other more established conceptions of the doctorate. For instance, care is often subsumed within the idea of stewardship of a discipline, a concept advanced by Golde and Walker (2006) in their well-known work on doctoral education in the United States.

Noddings and Barnacle advance a view of the care-full PhD which extends beyond a focus on traditional academic disciplines. Care, as articulated by these authors, is deeply relational. As Noddings (2005) explains, 'a caring relation is, in its most basic form is a connection or encounter' (p. 15) between human beings. The relationality of care also means it has pertinence not only 'to what we think about, but also to how we think' (Barnacle, 2018, p. 83). In this sense, we become more attentive to the need to foster researcher-community relationships and the thorny character of many of the current problems facing humanity calls for increased attention to the scope and limitations of disciplinary structures of knowledge. It also identifies a need for broader conceptions of what researchers might *care* about (Hancock, 2015 as cited in Barnacle, 2018).

Whilst Noddings offers a somewhat radical reconceptualisation of the structures of knowledge production in line with a care-full approach to scholarship, Noddings and Barnacle's arguments highlight the way in which thinking 'care-fully' about the doctorate may provide new ways of approaching knowledge production, which could potentially aide in breaking disciplinary boundaries. These approaches could allow for greater collaboration between scholars to enrich our approach to research education to better address the complex problems currently facing humanity (e.g. themes of care such as ecological sustainability and social responsibility). Framing

doctoral education around care may also potentially disrupt the dominant discourses around the purpose of doctoral study, allowing disruption of the binary of knowledge (for knowledge's sake) versus increasingly dominant instrumentalist conceptions of the doctorate for purely vocational purposes.

Conclusion

Our overarching goal in this chapter has been to extend existing considerations of the place of 'care' and 'carers' within doctoral education. In this chapter we have explored the complex discursive space that doctoral student carers occupy via a close analysis of two self-portraits and related diary-interview data produced by a doctoral parent named Gertie. In our analysis we have demonstrated how the discourses of 'intensive mothering' and 'the autonomous and unencumbered doctoral researcher' operate to produce the *doctoral student-mother* as a non-ideal form of doctoral *and* parental subjectivity. While the discourse of 'intensive mothering' calls mothers to devote significant time and emotional energy to their children, this often conflicts with idealised forms of doctoral subjectivity, which remain associated with autonomy, and a singular focus 'unencumbered' by care responsibilities. Our chapter evokes what it feels like for doctoral carers to be subject to these often-competing discourses which pull them in different directions and can create significant turbulence for both carer and student identities.

While sometimes we see a desire to move post- and after- some gender concerns in HE, our study points to powerful continuities in the unequal gendered division of care. The images we analyse evoke the ongoing significance of care to the lived reality of doctoral students, and the impact of being torn between different kinds of 'carer' and 'doctoral' ideals. It is our view that there are broad implications here not only for higher education institutions but also for the institution of the family. Universities remain an important locus for change, at both the curricula and policy levels (e.g. via timetabling, policies to allow children on campus). However, there is also a need for wider social change to shift the ways in which communities value and pay for care labour and to confront the uneven distribution of care responsibilities. In the second part of our chapter we extended our analyses to ask what greater attention to the concept of care might offer for doctoral education scholarship. Building on existing research, we explored 'care' as a critical concept with the potential to contribute to a wider re-imagining of doctoral education. Overall, our chapter has sought to link critical theorisations of how care labour becomes positioned as out of time/place in doctoral education with a wider theorisation of care as an appropriately core dimension of the doctoral curriculum.

Notes

- 1 For further methodological discussion in reporting on this project please see the following publications (Burford, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2021).
- 2 Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* was first published in 1929 as an extended essay. It is based on two lectures Woolf gave in October 1928 at Newham College and Girton College, at the University of Cambridge.

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10 Fragmented Perceptions of Institutional Support for Food-Insecure Student-Parents

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Student-parents in higher education continuously negotiate their identities to strike a balance between their family responsibilities and academic success. In the United States (US), nearly one in four tertiary students is a parent (Nelson et al., 2013), women represent almost three quarters of all student-parents and 43 per cent of all student-parents are single mothers (Gault et al., 2014). Additionally, more than 40 per cent of student-parents work full-time, with more than half dedicating at least 30 hours a week to caregiving activities (Nelson et al., 2013). Across countries and cultures, some student-parents report pursuing tertiary education to provide a better quality of life for their families as well as model a strong work ethic, goal setting and responsibility for their children (Lovell, 2014b; Peterson, 2016). Despite these motivating factors, student-parents face significant challenges to remaining enrolled and graduating. Economic circumstances and a lack of resources can play a pivotal role for student-parents, primarily single mothers, on whether they can further their education (Gerrard and Roberts, 2006). Additionally, concerns surrounding food insecurity (Brotton et al., 2018) and access to affordable childcare (Sallee and Cox, 2019) present obstacles that place them in a different situation than their peers without caregiving responsibilities.

Although there is significant research dedicated to the experiences of student-parents in colleges and universities, more research is needed on student-parents who identify as food-insecure. Students who lack adequate access to food are more at risk of experiencing disruption in their academic work as well as showing greater signs of stress, anxiety and frustration while attending university (Maynard et al., 2018; Payne-Sturges et al., 2018). Studies suggest that 11 to 36 per cent of students at four-year institutions in the United States experience food insecurity, rates that are equal or above national and local averages (Blagg et al., 2017; Brotton and Goldrick-Rab, 2018; Silva et al., 2017). Students who report being food-insecure are 15 times more likely to have failed a class and six times more likely to withdraw from coursework altogether (Silva et al., 2017). Food insecurity also affects students' mental health; food-insecure students reported feelings of anxiety, loneliness, anger, depression and being overwhelmed by their responsibilities (Martinez et al., 2018). On-campus food pantries have gained momentum as one solution to attempt to meet students' basic needs (Buch et al., 2016; El Zein et al., 2018; Gupton et al., 2018; Henry, 2017). These efforts are designed to alleviate the

stigma associated with food insecurity and create greater awareness of the resources available to help students (Henry, 2017).

Food insecurity does not affect all students equally. Student-parents are more likely to utilise the Supplemental and Nutrition Benefits Program (SNAP), a US-based federal food aid programme; be financially independent and identify as a racial or ethnic minority (Broton et al., 2018). Although US colleges and universities are ostensibly open to students from all social classes, cost-sharing in higher education in the 20th century has shifted the financial burden of paying for tertiary education to students and parents, leading to increased tuition, user fees for campus services, and a reduction in grants (Johnstone, 2004). Likewise, cost-sharing has led to a ballooning of outstanding student loan debt in the US in recent decades, from a total of 480 billion USD in 2006 to more than 1.7 trillion USD in the first quarter of 2021 (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, 2021). While the mid-20th century saw significant investment in expanding access to tertiary education through the creation of the GI Bill for returning World War II veterans and the creation of the Pell Grant, which provided need-based grants to facilitate nearly free college attendance (Thelin, 2019), the more recent rising cost of attendance and the concomitant disinvestment of the federal and state government in subsidising tertiary education have had significant impacts on college affordability. Food-insecure students may be particularly vulnerable to this disinvestment.

Student-parents face further challenges as they lack access to affordable child-care. Although many campuses provide resources specifically for student-parents, like childcare centres, many student-parents are unaware that such services even exist (Sallee and Cox, 2019). Additionally, child illness, lapses in day care, financial constraints, expensive day-care costs and inability to acquire short-term care may strain relationships between student-parents and faculty (Medved and Heisler, 2002). As the number of student-parents at colleges and universities increases, inadequate support services can impact their academic success and impede persistence (Lovell, 2014a).

Successfully addressing food insecurity on postsecondary campuses requires an interdisciplinary effort from student affairs professionals, academic faculty, campus administration, non-profits and governing bodies (Cady, 2014). On-campus food pantries, which provide basic food and personal care items free of charge to those in need, have become more common in the United States; as of 2020, the College and University Food Bank Alliance reported a membership of over 700 institutions (College and University Food Bank Alliance, 2020). Creating on-campus food pantries presents difficulties that include establishing legitimacy for the pantry, figuring out its exact role on campus and determining how it can serve as a gateway for food-insecure students to access additional support services (Gupton et al., 2018).

If a campus is able to establish an on-campus food pantry, getting students to utilise the service presents another series of challenges. Barriers for using an on-campus food pantry include stigma, lack of information on how to use the pantry, inconvenient hours that do not accommodate students' schedules and perceiving that other students on campus have needs greater than their own (El Zein et al.,

2018). To overcome these barriers, institutions might create greater awareness and visibility by reaching out to students in need of help and stressing that they are not alone (Henry, 2017). It is not clear, however, if institutions are successfully sharing information about food pantries with all eligible students, and the degree to which they target special populations like student-parents.

In this chapter, we discuss how one university in the North-eastern United States has responded to the needs of food-insecure student-parents. Using Joanne Martin's (1992) approach to different views of organisational culture as a theoretical lens, we explore stakeholders' different perceptions of the campus's effectiveness in responding to the specific needs of this population. Although senior administrators seem satisfied that the campus is doing all that it can to meet the needs of marginalised students, other staff members and students suggest that the campus has failed to provide support to those who need it most.

We gathered our data through case study, which is frequently defined by the use of a bounded system (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1994). The university, which we have given the pseudonym of Swanson University, serves as the case. Swanson University is a public research university¹ and a member of the Association of American Universities, an elite group of research universities located in the United States and Canada. With 20,000 undergraduates and 10,000 graduate students and approximately 7,000 faculty and staff, Swanson is well known in the area for its medical school and graduate programmes in science and engineering as well as business.

We conducted interviews with a total of 18 members of the campus community who held a variety of roles. We interviewed eight staff members, including both senior administrators and mid-level staff members; three student leaders of various campus organisations who are committed to addressing food insecurity and seven student-parents. Nearly all interviews took place in-person, though one took place via Zoom at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. All interviews sought to understand the participants' experiences either addressing or navigating food insecurity as well as issues relating to student-parents. For more details on data analysis and other methodological considerations, see Sallee et al., 2020.

In this chapter, we use composite narratives to report participants' experiences. Composite narratives combine several different interviews to convey the richness and complexity of the data into the perspective of one archetype, presenting research in a way that draws out a more generalised understanding of the phenomena (Willis, 2018). Although a relatively novel methodology, using composite narratives is well suited to building, through one story, a generally representative account of informants' experiences while maintaining anonymity (Willis, 2018, 2019). Despite aggregating multiple participants' experiences into each composite, all quotations come directly from interview transcripts (Willis, 2019). Four composite narratives – each connoted with a pseudonym – were created from the data: *Kathy*, a senior administrator who has oversight over campus resources designed to address issues facing student-parents and food-insecure students; *Patrick*, a mid-level administrator with direct day-to-day oversight of these campus resources; *Morgan*, an undergraduate student leader advocating for initiatives to address food insecurity; and *Donna*, a student-parent experiencing food insecurity.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses Joanne Martin's (1992) perspectives of organisational culture to examine the institutional response to food insecurity among student-parents on campus. Martin identified three competing social science perspectives that can be used to examine organisational culture: integration, differentiation and fragmentation. Three primary characteristics inform the integration perspective: culture reinforces the same themes across an organisation, all members of an organisation have the same views of that culture and culture is clearly defined without any ambiguity. Integration views of culture focus on interpersonal closeness, often described in familial terms. From this view, organisations can only thrive if there is top-to-bottom consensus on potentially divisive issues. This consensus is enforced through consistency: by consistent formal and informal practices, by cultural symbolism and by consistent organisational themes.

In contrast, differentiation views of organisational culture revolve around inconsistent manifestations of culture. A common view of the differentiation perspective is when managers say one thing but do another. This inconsistency manifests through action, symbolism and ideology. *Action inconsistency* occurs when an organisation's espoused themes are inconsistent with actual practices. An organisation that espouses anti-racist policies but does not address racist incidents illustrates action inconsistency. *Symbolic inconsistency* is evident through differences between espoused themes and cultural forms, such as rituals or insider jargon. For example, symbolic inconsistency would result if two different subcultures interpret an organisational symbol in competing ways. *Ideological inconsistency* manifests through conflict between espoused themes and organisational action. If a university espoused a commitment to both academic and athletic excellence but decided to fund a new football stadium over a new academic building, the university would exhibit ideological inconsistency. The differentiation perspective allows for consensus only within subcultural boundaries. Often, subcultures within organisations conflict with each other, but a differentiation perspective limits this conflict to disagreement among subcultures.

The fragmentation perspective adopts a postmodern perspective of organisational culture, where ambiguity is rampant in all aspects of organisational life due to a socially constructed reality rife with complexity and a lack of objective truth. Fragmentation perspectives on culture see consensus in constant flux and dependent on specific issues. Rather than subcultures focused on clearly defined relationships or identities, subcultures from a fragmentation perspective are 'permeable and fluctuating, in response to environmental changes ... The salience of particular subcultural memberships wax and wane, as issues surface, get resolved, or become forgotten in the flux of events' (Martin, 1992, p. 214). For example, a differentiation perspective may see subcultures centred around gender, race or job classification. However, a fragmentation perspective sees these 'group identities' as incongruent with stable subcultures, as multiple interpretations of reality are possible. In short, this perspective questions the validity of any sort of group identity – student-parent and food-insecure are meaningless constructs.

As Martin (1992) suggested, the boundaries of the three perspectives are meant to be permeable. Therefore, we find it valuable to examine this phenomenon from both the differentiation and fragmentation perspective. As integration views of organisational culture are characterised by an organisation-wide consensus, consistency across cultural manifestations and a lack of ambiguity, we focus only on differentiation and fragmentation perspectives in this chapter as they provide more utility for explaining how the university responds to the needs of food-insecure student-parents. Differentiation and fragmentation perspectives both focus on ambiguity in different ways – ambiguity as channelled through subcultures as in the differentiation perspective, or ambiguity as the essence of organisational culture as in the fragmentation perspective. Both help provide greater understanding of how culture shapes one institution's response to food-insecure student-parents.

Four Perspectives on Organisational Life for Food-Insecure Student-Parents

As Martin's (1992) different perspectives of culture suggest, an individual – or group's – position in an organisation shapes their perceptions of it. We offer four composites of various stakeholders in the campus community that illustrate profound differences in perceptions about the campus's culture and effectiveness in meeting the needs of food-insecure student-parents. Although the senior administrator suggests that the campus is fulfilling its obligations, the student-parent's narrative suggests otherwise.

Senior Administrator

Kathy is a senior-level director in charge of the student affairs unit that oversees the food pantry at Swanson University. When asked about how efforts to address food insecurity were going, Kathy replied, 'I'd say it's going well'. Her office had inherited the pantry a few months earlier from a different office that ran the pantry in a pilot phase the previous year. Her office was selected to assume control of the pantry as it was in a more highly trafficked space on campus and had both the space and staff to support it. She described her unit's role: '[The food pantry is] a new initiative here on campus, so I feel like in essence we helped launch it ... We really were tasked with implementing it and operationalising it'. Throughout our conversation, it became clear that she and her staff were still working out some of the details, though felt positive about how they were meeting the needs of food-insecure students on campus. However, it was also clear that they were not readily able to track who was accessing the pantry, nor was there any campus-wide effort to systematise donations to the pantry.

Kathy shared some details about the way that the pantry operated, though also referred us to one of her subordinates for more specific information. Her staff member was in charge of shopping for the food pantry and had more knowledge about the day-to-day details of the operation. She was proud of a new online ordering system, but seemed puzzled that nearly half of students did not pick up their orders. She did not have demographic information about who was using their

services. When we asked whether she had 'ever had conversations with any of the students about the challenges they're facing on campus', she shared that she had not, suggesting that maybe the office's receptionist had that information. Similarly, she could not provide any information about whether any student-parents were accessing their services. Although the office had recently started collecting demographic usage information, she knew little about the reason that students might be compelled to seek food assistance in the first place.

Kathy was quite concerned with the office's ability to sustain the food pantry and, in fact, other than providing the staff, neither the office nor the campus provided any funding to support the pantry. The initial \$5,000 used to buy food to stock the pantry came from the student government; the pantry further relied on crowdfunding campaigns and food drives to ensure its operation. She discussed the decision to house the pantry in her office due to the presence of student staff:

We have many students right at the reception desk that can serve as a receptionist as well as the distribution site is literally right behind the reception site. So, we didn't have to add additional staff just to serve as distributors ... We wanted it to be sustainable. We wanted to keep costs down.

This concern about keeping costs down extends to getting enough food and funding to support the pantry in the future. She discussed needing to figure out how many food drives the pantry would need to hold per year, soliciting donations from students, staff and faculty, in order to ensure that the pantry could keep operating. However, the process seemed daunting as she shared, 'I don't even know how you get your arms around who's doing what'. Kathy also wondered whether there might be some misuse of the pantry:

I think it'd be great if there was more of an organised approach [to collecting information about who is using the pantry.] ... I don't know yet, if there were repeat customers, so to speak. Is it the same person coming? Is it really serving the purpose that it was intended to? Or are there people that are perhaps misusing it? I'm like I don't believe so, but until we have the data, I don't know.

Kathy later went on to say that if a particular student were accessing the pantry several times a week, there should be some sort of follow-up to point the student to other resources. However, again later in the interview, she mused aloud whether students might be abusing the system and that the office needed data to help answer the question. In sum, Kathy felt positive about the efforts they had put into place in the pantry's first few months of operation to streamline an ordering system for students and seek ways to sustain the programme without relying on institutional funds. However, her comments revealed a lack of knowledge about who might be accessing the pantry and a concern that some might be taking advantage of free food.

Staff

Patrick is a staff member on campus who believes that universities have an obligation to provide services to serve the non-traditional student, like student-parents. However, he does not feel that the university is living up to its obligations. Patrick is supportive of the efforts made by his colleagues who oversee services that include the on-campus food pantry, childcare centre and distribution of emergency relief funds because he believes they help make a difference for students who are struggling. Additionally, his day-to-day responsibilities present him with first-hand experience of the type of barriers that some students experience:

Usually it's everything ... 'it's my monthly expenses that I'm struggling with. It's my utility, my rent, my food, my car. And maybe something related to childcare or school care ... It's like I am not making it month to month,' based on whatever happened.

These sentiments motivated Patrick to advocate for non-traditional students. He shared, 'there's always something that an institution should be looking at for students that are marginalised or have a more challenging route to becoming successful'. Patrick mentioned that, through grants and donations, the institution had been able to provide over \$157,000 in emergency funding to approximately 140 students since 2018. Although it is unknown how many of these students are parents, Patrick acknowledged that this population has utilised the emergency relief fund. Patrick shared, 'When we see parent applicants, it's usually some really desperate moments. Where something has happened and there's no other resource'. While these funds provided emergency relief for student-parents, Patrick believes it is only a temporary solution.

Patrick sits on a committee with a staff member from Swanson's childcare centre and has heard how little institutional support the centre receives. The staff of the childcare centre understand the need to provide a service to student-parents, but student usage rates are low. Only 5 per cent of enrolment at the childcare centre were children of student-parents. In addition, the staff are unsure how to promote the childcare centre among student-parents on campus.

Patrick's commitment to marginalised students led him to assist with the management of the on-campus food pantry. Patrick pointed out, 'food was becoming a big issue that we were seeing students having access to, especially when they were experiencing an emergency'. Although these responsibilities were not listed in his job description, he believed, 'people are doing this because they care about the issue', so he continued to contribute to the initiative as often as possible.

However, Patrick did not believe that senior administrators shared this desire to address food insecurity, evident through a lack of financial support and hesitancy to promote services. Patrick stated, 'we've got a campus right now that has been more focused on their fiscal and resource management related to how we fund programmatic events and initiatives'. He felt that the food pantry was not a priority for senior administrators allocating financial resources.

In his critique of the institution's response in alleviating food insecurity, Patrick struggled with the food pantry's accessibility to students.

We were told not to push the pantry ... I don't really understand it. But it seems like there was like an undercurrent of ... we don't want to push out that ... 'hey students, there's a pantry available for you to eat', because it would potentially ... reflect badly on tuition hikes or other costs.

To Patrick, location plays an integral role in messaging to students. Where a service is located can determine its visibility to students as well as how often it is utilised. Patrick shared, 'from a large institution ... when you implement a resource and service through a large organisation, the physical location of it can really dictate students' knowledge of it or students' access to it'. This situation was an issue for both the location of the food pantry and the location of the childcare centre; both were relatively invisible to the campus population.

Patrick suggested that removing the stigma of food insecurity is essential to addressing the issue. He shared, 'but really, everyone should be aware. It hasn't been [discussed] very much'. The campus has not been able to make the progress Patrick desired as a result of a lack of leadership from those in charge. He believed that students, faculty, staff and even alumni could rally around the problem of food insecurity if it was publicised more by the institution.

Patrick believes that Swanson University could be doing much more to provide services directed at the non-normative student. However, he shared 'it's sort of like you're on your own ... I'm hearing that more from the students. They're like, well, I tried this and that but [Swanson doesn't] care. You're just something they don't deal with'. Due to a perceived lack of support from senior administrators, Patrick explained that advocating for the non-normative student falls on the shoulders of entry- and mid-level administrators, like him. For Patrick, student-parents continue to be an invisible population at the institution that go unnoticed by those in charge.

Student Leader

Morgan represents student leaders who have some role in developing or implementing campus resources for students facing food insecurity. Although they are passionate about increasing awareness about food insecurity's impact on students, discussion of food-insecure student-parents rarely enters the conversation. They were appointed as a student representative on a campus food insecurity taskforce. Morgan is also a graduate student worker in the office where the campus food pantry is housed, which opened the year before Morgan arrived on campus to begin their graduate programme. Their previous institution had a well-established food support programme despite a small enrolment, so Morgan anticipated Swanson's would be even more established: 'Then you come to this school that's a big school, and we can't figure out how to run a food pantry... It's weird that this is just happening, when food insecurity is not new'. Morgan was surprised that an institution the size of Swanson did not have a more entrenched culture of care as was displayed at their undergraduate institution.

When discussions in the taskforce stalled, Morgan supported the undergraduate student government's decision to buy \$5,000 worth of food to launch the food pantry. Discussing this decision, Morgan said they thought that 'if the [student government] didn't initially kick off the pantry, we still might be struggling to get it off the ground ... once it's started we can't ever stop it'.

Morgan's frustration with the administration of the food pantry is palpable. They repeatedly highlighted an organisational challenge: because no one's sole responsibility is administering the food pantry, it is an additional task assigned to professional and student staff who are already stretched thin.

It doesn't seem like a priority. It seems like something that we realised needs to be done at the university. We realise that we need to have it ... but do I think it's a priority? Do I think anybody's really passionate about this? I don't think so.

Staff in their office, including their supervisor and other professional staff involved in the administration of the food pantry, are well intentioned but are not passionate about food insecurity or the food pantry. Because administering the pantry was assigned to them, Morgan perceived that the staff is simply fulfilling an obligation rather than truly seeking to best meet the needs of students experiencing food insecurity. Morgan highlighted a lack of data on pantry usage as an example when asked whether student-parents were utilising the pantry: 'If there are student-parents that are coming into [the] food pantry, there's not data for that... It could be that they're coming in and we just don't know'.

Morgan expressed a concern that students perform most of the work that goes into the implementation of programmes to address food insecurity. Morgan and the student government spurred the creation of the food pantry with the initial purchase of food, and volunteers from the student government still fulfil food pantry orders. Morgan says they would like to see 'more of a campus-wide support of [the food pantry], and leaving it less in the hands of the students, possibly and more in the support of faculty and just of the university as a whole'.

Morgan's concerns extend beyond the background role of student government volunteers. In particular, Morgan highlighted the use of student paraprofessionals in the distribution of food pantry orders.

The student assistants don't really seem to understand the fact that this is like an insecurity. So, someone will come in and be like 'I'm here to pick up my food,' and they'll be like 'what's your name' or whatever. Then they'll yell to the student that's sitting behind them and be like 'oh, Joe is here to pick up their food. Do we have it?' So it's like we're in an office with a lot of people and it's kind of just like being thrown around.

Morgan is concerned about the impact of students without proper training being responsible for this task. They would like to see more training for student workers to ensure discretion. However, because the student workers have other tasks

unrelated to the distribution of food pantry orders, additional training is not seen as important by administrators.

Morgan led an effort to develop a way for excess food from campus events to be shared with the campus community. They built off of ideas on other campuses and developed a group on social media that enables members of the campus community to alert users when excess food is available. Morgan mentioned that administrators were supportive of this initiative after issues such as inconvenience to catering crews and food safety issues were discussed. Administrators have offered to promote the group as part of their support, but this has not yet happened. Morgan said they wished that the institution might provide more support, both financial and in publicising various campus resources for food-insecure students.

Student-Parent

Donna represents student-parents experiencing food insecurity. Donna told us she is used to making sacrifices to meet basic needs for herself and her two children, and she has developed strategies to ensure that those needs will be met. One of those strategies means sacrificing the quality of food in the house, which she recognised is not ideal for her kids' development. Items like frozen pizzas and canned goods make up the majority of their meals, which allows Donna to be sure her children consume enough calories on a limited budget. When she is short on food, she portions carefully and is sure to be the one with less on her plate. She noted that when times are especially tough, she relies on her immediate family for support, but she goes to great lengths to ensure they do not know just how much she struggles, sharing:

I never let them know how bad it gets. Like, even when it got bad ... I wasn't lying. I was just trying to protect my own pride, because I didn't want to make that phone call saying hey, we don't have food. But I would call up and be like 'hey, your [grandkids] want a sleepover.'

Donna is grateful that, when in dire straits, she knows her children will be taken care of, even if she cannot provide for herself.

Since beginning at Swanson, Donna has struggled to connect with the institution, her faculty and her classmates. Unlike her undergraduate experience at a four-year, regional public college, she finds her new institution to be 'competitive' and 'sterile', believing that her classmates do not want to connect because they see her as competition, and her faculty do not care to connect because they are too busy with their research agendas. What is more, even if she wanted to connect with the faculty and staff in her department, they would not be available at a time conducive for her to meet as a working mother. 'I've never met them', she explained, 'they're [here] during the day'. The few opportunities there are to connect, however, are often around food. Donna described a department potluck that she did not attend because she could not bring a dish of her own to share.

Donna knows there are resources on campus that might be able to help her with food, but she does not believe they are designed for working parents. Like the availability of the faculty and staff in her department, she anticipates that the

campus food pantry is not open when she would be able to come to campus. Further, she finds herself reluctant to go to it since it is at the centre of campus, explaining, ‘it’s like, sometimes, those are the students that you go to class with, and I don’t want them to know that about me’. What is more, she questions the nutritional content of the food available at the pantry. As a mother, she needs to prioritise foods high in nutritional value for her children.

Is it going to be canned food? Well, I can probably afford canned food. You know what I mean? If I knew it was coming for ... fresh fruits and vegetables, I’d be here in a second. Access to healthy food, I’m all for it.

Donna’s food insecurity is directly related to her inability to afford food that meets her standards for nutrition for her children. Already relying on items like canned and frozen foods, she is reluctant to risk her reputation going to a pantry to get food already stocked in her home. Similarly, Donna did not utilise the campus childcare centre as a resource. In fact, she made no mention of it as a potential resource in her discussion of childcare options, opting instead for support from family members.

As an undergraduate student at her previous institution, Donna became accustomed to a campus that normalised her needs. She saw flyers for students who were hungry in bathrooms, and she saw these services operating during evenings and weekends when she was able to make it to campus. In her view, it is the Swanson culture that has left her feeling most like an outsider, without resources she can comfortably access.

Discussion

An organisation’s culture is best analysed from multiple perspectives. Rather than explicitly defining Swanson University’s culture in objective terms, Martin’s (1992) three perspectives on organisational culture offer an opportunity to analyse it from multiple, subjective lenses. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, we focus on two of Martin’s three perspectives on culture: differentiation and fragmentation. Each stakeholder’s view of food-insecure student-parent supports relates to their place in the institution and how they view the institution’s culture. From the differentiation perspective, this translates to each composite narrative representing a subculture that has a differing view of institutional values. From the fragmentation perspective, it is apparent there is a lack of consensus and ambiguity among subgroups, reflected by incongruence within each composite narrative. Both perspectives illustrate a vast gap in how various stakeholders understand their goal of supporting food-insecure student-parents, and a clear centring of students as carers is not present outside of what we hear directly from the student-parents themselves.

Differentiation

The differentiation perspective is characterised by inconsistency among groups with some consensus among subgroups. Action inconsistency occurs when

espoused values are inconsistent with actual practices (Martin, 1992). This is most apparent in the value of meeting the needs of food-insecure students on campus, which all three of the institutional agents' (senior administrator, staff administrator and student leader) composites reflected. As past research has found (Cady, 2014), implementing effective food assistance initiatives requires buy-in and effort across campus stakeholders. From the senior administrator's perspective, this value is being met in practice. Kathy conveyed a sense of confidence that students were able to get what they needed through the food pantry. The staff administrator, however, expressed doubt that senior administrators supported initiatives to address food insecurity, pointing to a lack of financial investment and hesitancy to promote services. Morgan, the student leader, expressed an even greater sense of frustration with a lack of top-level support for the food pantry, emphasising that the student government was responsible for getting it 'off the ground' with the initial purchase of \$5,000 worth of food and voluntary labour.

Ideological inconsistency occurs when an institution's values and priorities conflict with one another (Martin, 1992). Continuing with the example of the institution's value of meeting the needs of food-insecure students, institutional agents contended that this encompassed meeting the needs of food-insecure student-parents. Yet Donna, the student-parent, conveyed a clear sense of the institution valuing and prioritising support for childless students. The competitive nature of the research university, lack of access to faculty and hours of service operation all served as evidence to Donna that the institution did not design education or services to include student-parents. Donna's perception of the institution valuing childless students is supported, at least in part, by the lack of engagement by institutional agents in discussion around student-parent needs. Although administrators and student leaders agreed that student-parents were a group whose needs should be met through food-insecurity initiatives, none could speak to specific facets of supports that reflected this priority.

In both the examples of action inconsistency and ideological inconsistency, there is a presumed consensus among subgroups. Specifically, each composite narrative encompassing not just one but several participants reflects a consensus that, for example, multiple student leaders agreed that there was a lack of top-level support for the food pantry. The fragmentation perspective on culture, however, emphasises ambiguity among groups themselves. Where consensus exists within groups from the differentiation perspective, the fragmentation perspective finds the ambiguity that permeates throughout groups of the organisation.

Fragmentation

Food insecurity generated some concern at all levels of the institution, but as each composite narrative made clear, there is a lack of consensus on the importance of the issue, who it affects and to what extent the institution is responsible for addressing it, underscoring Martin's (1992) fragmentation view of culture. Establishing an effective campus food pantry is fraught with challenges, from legitimacy issues to determining its appropriate role on a campus (Gupton et al., 2018). Fragmentation compounded those challenges at Swanson. The institution

established a food pantry but did not identify a long-term or stable source of funding. Some stakeholders were committed to its success, like the student leaders who devoted large sums of financial resources and labour toward its development, while others exercised caution about advertising it, while some student-parents were unaware of its presence.

From the fragmented perspective, not only do issues emerge among stakeholders differently, but the salience of these issues among individuals fluctuates as well, unequally across subcultures. In this study, a fragmented view of culture is thus reflected by incongruence found within composite narratives themselves. Indeed, incongruence is apparent in each composite. Kathy, on one hand, believed the food pantry effectively met the institution's goal of addressing food insecurity while also questioning whether students were overusing the pantry, musing aloud about potential for abuse. Patrick believed the institution should prioritise supporting student-parent needs while also expressing uncertainty about whether student-parents actually utilise the food pantry. Likewise, Morgan emphasised prioritising non-traditional student needs with the food pantry while simultaneously reflecting a sense of helplessness that the pantry was not meeting student-parent needs.

The consequences of incongruence among the administrator and student leader composites, along with the lack of consensus and support behind the issue of food insecurity among student-parents, are evident in the student-parent experiences. Donna's story demonstrates the costs of this lack of coalescence around supporting student-parent food insecurity. Once food assistance initiatives are established, getting students to utilise them presents additional challenges (El Zein et al., 2018). In addition to the difficulties identified by El Zein et al. (2018), such as stigma and lack of information, it is clear from Donna's perspective that the institution has not designed education or services for students like her. She struggles to make ends meet, and she makes sacrifices to her own health and wellness to ensure her children do not go hungry, yet she has also not seriously considered support from campus resources because she does not believe they were designed for students like her. The institution's lack of consensus around supporting students like Donna is not lost on her; she recognises that the institution has some resources available, but she chooses to navigate her challenges independently out of recognition that those resources were not structured for student-parents.

In conclusion, our composite narratives suggest that perspectives of culture are not uniform, but rather different stakeholders have competing perspectives. Often, the perspectives espoused by those with institutional power gain traction, thus further penalising food-insecure students, student-parents and other marginalised groups. Our study suggests that colleges and universities need to gather and respond to input from all on campus. In this study, although administrators felt confident that they were responding to the needs of food-insecure student-parents, the population suggested otherwise. Small actions include making sure that any existing food pantry publicises its services and offers reasonable opening hours as well as stocking food items that are nutritious and meet the needs of those with children. Additionally, it seems critical for food pantries to collect usage data to assess which student populations their services are not reaching, and then take steps to address that gap. However, for many campuses, the issue is a larger

cultural one; institutions need to make sure that their cultures are welcoming for all, providing the appropriate programmatic infrastructure as well as interpersonal support so that all feel welcome. Until the federal and state governments restore their commitment to funding public higher education, the onus rests on individual institutions to provide appropriate support so that students of all social classes and life stages can thrive.

Note

- 1 In the US, universities which receive funding directly from state governments are considered public universities. Although public universities also rely on funding in the form of tuition and portable federal financial aid from students, direct government support allows these institutions to typically offer lower tuition rates than their private, non-profit counterparts.

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11 ‘It’s not only me doing things for me’

Conference participation for doctoral students with caring responsibilities

Emily F. Henderson

Introduction

Conferences are recognised to be vital spaces for the development of doctoral students, providing access to networks and knowledge, as well as socialising researchers into academia (Chapman et al., 2009; Fakunle et al., 2019; Kuzhabekova and Temerbayeva, 2018). Conferences provide a fertile ground for analysing what is both considered essential to the academic profession and yet portrayed as luxurious and extraneous (Henderson, 2020a). The benefits of attending conferences are intangible (Edelheim et al., 2018), though for doctoral researchers there are more obvious pressures pertaining to employability and knowledge gain. At the same time, it is recognised that attending conferences for any academic with caring responsibilities is challenging (Henderson and Moreau, 2020), but also that there are particular challenges for doctoral students with caring responsibilities (Hook, 2016). This chapter therefore focuses specifically on the tension between the heightened importance of conferences for doctoral students and the heightened challenges of care which accompany the financial constraints and precarity often associated with doctoral study.

Drawing on the ‘In Two Places at Once’ project (Henderson et al., 2018), which focused on access to and participation in conferences for academics with caring responsibilities, this empirically oriented chapter is based on an in-depth analysis of five participants who were doctoral students. While the project itself spanned several country contexts (in terms of country of residence and location of conference), the five participants featured in this chapter were all based in the UK at the time of the study. The study involved diary-interview method (Zimmerman and Wieder, 1977). The analysis aims to showcase the diversity of ways in which care, conferences and doctoral student status combine to create different tensions and pressures. As such, the chapter argues that combining care and doctoral studies must be conceptualised as inherently heterogeneous. Moreover, by exploring the intersection between care and conferences, a core argument of the chapter is that care and conferences must be understood within a wider sociological frame that encompasses gendered social norms and negotiations beyond the workplace. This does not deny the need to develop care-sensitive strategies within higher education institutions – rather, the objective of this chapter is to provide a wider context

for the development of these strategies, in order to understand how the issues that doctoral carers face play out in their everyday lives.

Framing conference attendance for doctoral students who are carers

Many accounts of the benefits and motivations for conference attendance construct academics as purely or predominantly professional beings (Mair, 2010; Severt et al., 2007). The assumptions that underpin this construction of a professional academic are that academics make the decision to attend conferences as autonomous, unencumbered individuals. An increasing number of papers have appeared in recent years contesting this framing, and noting that access to and experiences of conferences are inflected by gender, race and ethnicity, caste, dis/ability and a range of these in their intersections with each other (Hodge, 2014; King et al., 2018; Mair and Frew, 2018; Sabharwal et al., 2020; Timperley et al., 2020). However, the dominant discourse of professionalism remains in place for conferences. This section of the chapter explores first how doctoral students are positioned in academic literature in relation to conferences. Second, the section explores how academic carers are positioned in relation to conferences. The section concludes by drawing together these two distinct constructs and laying out the terrain for an analysis of doctoral carers and conferences.

Conferences for doctoral students

When exploring the ways in which conferences and doctoral students are addressed in the literature, it is important to first establish how conferences are constructed as important sites of academic and career development for all academics, in order to identify where there are specificities for doctoral students. Conferences are considered to be valuable spaces for academics to access new knowledge, develop collaborations for publications and projects, network and enhance their reputations (Rowe, 2018; Wang et al., 2017). As such, conferences operate as catalysts for academic work, and have been studied in terms of their contribution to the internationalisation of research (Kyvik and Larsen, 1994; Smeby and Trondal, 2005). This discourse extends to doctoral students, where the tone shifts to emphasise the benefit of conferences for professional socialisation, development of doctoral work and professional development experience of presenting (Chapman et al., 2009; Fakunle et al., 2019; Kuzhabekova and Temerbayeva, 2018; Subramanian, 2020; Thompson et al., 2012). Though the discourse differs somewhat, the construction is the same – the assumption of an autonomous professional; indeed, the assumption of an individual who is freely mobile may be even more pronounced for doctoral students (Herschberg et al., 2018).

In addition to empirical studies of the motivations and benefits of conferences for doctoral students, there is also another set of literature which consists of doctoral students' accounts of attending conferences. Papers within this set of literature confirm, extend and challenge the motivations and benefits of conferences for doctoral students that are set out in the professional development-oriented

literature. For instance, a paper by Edelman et al. (2018) on the 'intangible return on investment' from attending conferences includes doctoral students' reflections on the conference. In addition to established benefits such as socialisation, networking or skill acquisition, the participants in this study also pointed to other critical considerations, such as the irony of a conference on care having the implication that 'care had to be shifted to others to perform at home' during the conference (p. 100). In a similar vein, French et al. (2021) analyse their experiences of attending the 2019 Annual Adult Education Research Conference. These authors discuss the motivations and benefits such as networking, gaining experience of presenting, receiving feedback on doctoral work, accessing new learning. However their account also includes a more critical discussion of power play at the association's business meeting which was held at the conference, as graduate students had experienced both 'inclusion and exclusion in the business meeting' (p. 77). De Picker (2020) sets out the ways in which conferences are important for doctoral student development, and then explicates how the normative practices involved in conference attendance are experienced as (in)surmountable obstacles for dis/abled doctoral students.

From this summary analysis of literature on doctoral students and conferences, a common discourse emerges, of the importance of conferences for doctoral students' professional development and socialisation to the academic career. At the same time, critical threads are discernible in doctoral students' analyses of attending conferences which disrupt the veneer of the dominant discourse. These critical threads are divergent in nature, but show that doctoral students are aware of the challenges of attending conferences as well as the imperative to attend these events. In the next section, care is explored as one such critical thread, which forms the central focus of this chapter.

Conferences for carers

There is a relatively substantial – and growing – literature on the ways in which academic careers and caring responsibilities intersect. This literature tends to focus on motherhood and the difficulty of balancing career ambition with pressures to conform to societal expectations of mothering (Amsler and Motta, 2019; Ollilainen, 2020; Thun, 2019; Ward and Wolf-Wendell, 2012). Common themes in this literature are the compromises that academic women make in both their careers and their care practices, the sacrifices to personal well-being and self-care that are necessary in order to maintain care and career, and the reduction of career ambitions. A smaller number of studies focus on other carers such as academic fathers (Sallee, 2014) and other caring responsibilities beyond – and in addition to – parenting (Moreau and Robertson, 2019). However, the dominant focus in this literature is on mothers caring for children. An underlying, but unspoken, assumption of many papers in this area or research is of a 'heterosexual dyadic partnership between two cisgendered individuals' (Henderson, 2020b, p. 4; see also Beddoes and Pawley, 2013), where the woman is the primary carer for children. Within this family formation, it is the primary carer who is less mobile due to the household's reliance on the primary carer for everyday tasks and overall household

management – a situation which I have discussed elsewhere as ‘sticky care’ (Henderson, 2020b). In a profession where mobility and motility (the potential to be mobile, see Dubois et al., 2015) are prized as career attributes, primary carers are highly disadvantaged (Henderson and Moreau, 2020). This disadvantage tends to fall on women within the dominant family formation outlined above, which means that a causal relationship is drawn between gender and care-related immobility (*ibid.*). While the association between gender and academic im/mobility has been researched (Jöns, 2011; Leemann, 2010), there is a need for more research that focuses on care and academic im/mobility, recognising that care as a gendered phenomenon is not limited to the abovementioned family formation. This chapter addresses care as an inclusive concept that encompasses care for partners, children, other family member, friends, pets and other kin (Henderson et al., 2018), and therefore seeks to validate different forms of care.

Conferences often enter into the discussion of care and academic careers, as an example of the impossibility of juggling care and work, in particular with reference to the additional challenge of engaging in work-related travel. For instance, in-passing references to conferences appear in some of the works cited in the above paragraph. Thun (2019) notes that ‘planning for conferences abroad is a logistic puzzle’ (p. 8); one of the authors of the paper by Amsler and Motta (2019) reflects ‘It would be fine if I had a wife to look after the kids while I went to a conference’ (p. 89); Ward and Wolf-Wendell’s (2012) book includes numerous references to conferences, such as their use of conferences to exemplify the primary care status of academic mothers: ‘it is difficult to travel as much for conferences and for conducting research’ (p. 70). It is less common to find literature that focuses directly on conferences and care, and where this does exist it tends to focus on issues of caring for children while attending conferences (Bos et al., 2019; Lipton, 2019), though there is a separate focus on academics travelling to conferences accompanied by partners (Yoo and Wilson, 2020). Placing together the in-passing references to conferences and the few papers on conferences and care, it is possible to draw a picture of conferences as exclusionary, both in terms of managing to travel to conferences and in terms of managing care (on site or from a distance) while attending conferences.

Attending conferences is a valued, but challenging, practice for academics who are carers. For doctoral students who are carers, there are two additional considerations that exaggerate the complexity of attending conferences. First, being a doctoral student often means an increased emphasis on participating in conferences as these events are characterised as valuable spaces for entry into the academic profession. Second, the challenge of managing care and conferences may be exaggerated by the added financial pressures and precarity of being a doctoral student. Exploring these considerations, and the extent to which they hold, is the focus of the analysis in this chapter.

The ‘In Two Places at Once’ study

The empirical study that underpins this chapter was an in-depth, exploratory qualitative study entitled ‘In Two Places at Once: the Impact of Caring

Responsibilities on Academics' Conference Participation' (Henderson et al., 2018). The study focused on academics who both self-identified as academics and as having caring responsibilities. For this chapter, five participants who were doctoral students have been selected for analysis. Participants were specifically selected for this chapter who discussed both their doctoral status and their caring responsibilities. In the study, care was defined widely in order to capture the ways in which different caring responsibilities affect academics' conference attendance. The study used diary-interview method (Zimmerman and Wieder, 1977), where participants completed a care diary for one conference they attended during the research period (Henderson, 2021). To qualify for the study, participants had to be attending an in-person conference, but to be as inclusive as possible, the definition of a conference included one-day events which could be on participants' own university campus. The care diary included: preparation tasks before the conference; interactions with and thoughts about caring responsibilities and/or co-carers while at the conference as well as catch-up tasks (Henderson, 2019). In the follow-up interview, the diary formed the basis for discussion both of the specific conference and of participants' conference attendance in general. This approach yielded rich detail on the lived experiences of managing conferences and care.

Participants for the study were recruited via social media calls and messages on academic mailing lists, and were recruited on a first-come, first-served basis. Participants could be from or based in any country. The sample yielded a great deal of variety in relation to caring responsibilities, but almost exclusively women were included. This was in part because, interestingly, some of my messages were passed on to potential participants to volunteer for a study about *women* and conference attendance. The five participants included in this chapter were all women, all based in the UK, though not all were British. No participants were accompanied by any caring responsibilities or co-carers to the conference. Further detail is included about these five participants in Table 11.1, but more detailed information cannot be given due to anonymity concerns.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and initially read with the care diaries so as to match the information in the diaries with the more detailed elaboration contained in the interviews. Participants' accounts were then thematically read according to: (i) where they mentioned their motivations for attending the conference, (ii) where they mentioned issues specifically related to being a doctoral student and carer and attending conferences. I then read the transcripts again to make sense of these remarks within the context of participants' full accounts, in order to capture the nuances. The analysis sections therefore seek to capture how the participants represented themselves as both doctoral students and carers, and how these two aspects of their lives intertwined in similar and different ways.

Doctoral students attending conferences

An important first step for the analysis presented in this chapter is to show how the participants in the study accorded with common discourses of the motivations for and benefits from attending conferences for doctoral students. This is a significant analytical move because, in addressing the challenges of managing care

Table 11.1 Information about the Doctoral Status and Care Situation of Doctoral Participants from the 'In Two Places at Once' Project

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Place of Residence</i>	<i>Location and Duration of Conference</i>	<i>PhD Status</i>	<i>Care Situation at the Time of the Conference</i>
P2	UK (Midlands)	Denmark 4 days (trip 5 days)	Full-time PhD student, funded	<i>Partner (man)</i> : works freelance, some flexibility for childcare; <i>Children</i> : 9 years, 6 years, 8 months; <i>Childcare (regular)</i> : nursery, school, after school clubs
P7	UK (Midlands)	UK (South Wales) 3 days (trip 3 days)	Full-time PhD student, funded	<i>Partner (woman)</i> : an academic; <i>Mother</i> : diagnosed with breast cancer the week before the conference; <i>Sister</i> : struggling with her own caring responsibilities as well as mother's diagnosis
P11	UK (North)	UK (North) 3 days (trip 3 days)	Part-time PhD student; full-time senior lecturer	<i>Partner (woman)</i> : works at home in a less pressured job, is the primary carer; <i>Children</i> : 16 years, 13 years; <i>Pet</i> : dog; <i>Elderly aunt</i> : she was like a parent to P11 after her parents died, now seriously ill; <i>Cousin and cousin's partner</i> : caring for elderly aunt and in touch with P11 with updates; <i>Voluntary work</i> : P11 has volunteering commitments on some weekends
P12	UK (Midlands)	UK (Midlands) 1 day (trip 1 day)	Full-time PhD student (started as part-time PhD student), funded	<i>Partner (man)</i> : has relatively flexible job in terms of hours but also an expectation of presence at the office; <i>Children</i> : 5 years, 2 years; <i>Childcare (regular)</i> : school, nursery
P14	UK (Midlands)	UK (Midlands) 1 day (trip 1 day)	Full-time PhD student, funded	<i>Ex-partner (man)</i> : father of P14's child, looks after child on alternate weekends; <i>Child</i> : 5 years; <i>Childcare (regular)</i> : school, breakfast club, after school club

in relation to conferences, it is possible to elide the fact that academic carers are still academics with academic motivations and professional desires. Contrary to some accounts of academic mobility which chart a reduced desire for mobility as a result of caring responsibilities (Nielsen, 2017), this study found that mobility was couched in strong contradictory desires to both go and stay. In order to lay the foundation for the subsequent analysis of how doctoral status and care intersect in relation to conference attendance, this first section outlines the ways in which study participants echoed common motivation/benefit discourses, and therefore also shows that doctoral students with caring responsibilities are doctoral students in their own right, as well as carers.

In the five participants' accounts, motivations and benefits included all of the aspects referred to in the literature section. For instance, P2, who was in the final stage of her doctorate, emphasised the importance of presenting, stating, 'now I wouldn't go to a conference where I don't have a paper to present' (P2, interview). She also referred to a supplementary role she took at the conference in terms of gaining experience and instrumentally adding to her CV: 'I was convening as well so I played a bigger role than usual ... it was a good experience and it looks good on the CV I guess' (P2, interview). Being at a conference at this stage of her doctorate fed directly into P2's career objectives, which she recorded in her diary prior to attending the conference: 'going to the conference is also increasing my chances to find a job in Academia (maybe?)' (P2, diary). The '(maybe?)' recorded in this excerpt, however, recognises the intangible and indirect return on investment from conferences (Edelheim et al., 2018). P14 situated her rationale for attending conferences in a similar frame of career planning:

I see it [attending conferences] as part of something that's important to do for my career, I see it as part of my PhD and, you know, I have quite a clear career path so I understand that part of getting where I want to go is, you know, getting out, getting my research out there and presenting and meeting other people, networking, all of the things that conferences involve.

(P14, interview)

Unlike P2, who was close to finishing her PhD, P14 was in the initial stages, but as a career changer (she had been a teacher for eight years) she was already planning ahead for her doctorate and beyond. In this account of attending conferences, the practice is normalised a 'part of my PhD' and couched in terms of the direct and indirect benefits of 'getting my research out there' as part of 'getting where I want to go'. Networking as a beneficial practice of conference attendance is also reflected in Fakunle et al.'s (2019) study of doctoral students' motivations to attend conferences, and this rationale was equally emphasised in this study by P2, P14 and P11.

In addition to considerations of how conferences would feed into career development, participants laid out other motivations relating to the intellectual work of conferences. For instance, P7 stated, 'I always find that a conference ... somehow kind of reinforce[s] why I'm interested in something – or that I am interested in something' (P7, interview), and P12 noted, 'this one was particularly useful to really

help my thinking in terms of analysis...I think in terms of moving my thinking forward, that's quite an important purpose' (P12, interview). As a more tangible outcome, P7 added that the conference 'was also really useful because my paper was connected to the writing I'd been doing so to ... kind of get that across, made it clearer to me what it had been about' (P7, interview). As discussed in the literature section, conferences for doctoral students are important sites for professional socialisation. This rationale appeared strongly in P14's account:

I really enjoy listening to other people present about their research and looking at their presentations and just seeing how people interact really, and it gives me ideas about things I can do in the future.

(P14, interview)

Finally, P11 drew an important distinction between conferences she attends in her role as Senior Lecturer and those she attends as a PhD student. As an academic in a discipline where she delivers an accredited professional qualification, she attends conferences specifically for this role, which included the conference she recorded for this study. The purpose of this conference was 'networking and updating', as opposed to conferences she attends for her PhD, which are 'more about that academic stimulus so that I would go if I've got a paper to present' (P11, interview).

The summary analysis presented in this section clearly demonstrates that the doctoral students in the 'In Two Places at Once' study held motivations for conference attendance that are common to doctoral students irrespective of care status. This is an important reminder that, while attending conferences may be more challenging for doctoral students with caring responsibilities, doctoral students' aims and desires for conference attendance are not in themselves different from doctoral students in general.

Doctoral students with caring responsibilities attending conferences

The second phase of analysis reintroduces participants' caring responsibilities, showing how caring responsibilities intersected with experiences of trying to attend and participate in conferences, and specifically how this intersection was influenced by participants' status as doctoral researchers. As discussed in the introduction, a core aim of this chapter is to show the heterogeneity of doctoral researchers with caring responsibilities, in order to argue for a wide conceptualisation of this 'group' in both research-based and institutional framings. As such, in this section the participants are presented individually, with each portrait depicting a particular focus that emerged in each participant's account. The accounts are then brought together in the final analysis section, which reads across the accounts and situates them in a wider discussion of doctoral researchers' conference attendance.

Account 1: working from home or home-bound?

When I designed the 'In Two Places at Once' study, as noted above I included one-day conferences on participants' own university campuses as potential conferences to

record. Two of the doctoral participants attended events of this kind, and it is important to note that even these conferences presented significant challenges for doctoral students with caring responsibilities. The event that P12 attended was specifically for doctoral students and was free to attend, so there were no financial constraints from this point of view. However, P12 pointed out that the training support grant which is associated with her scholarship does not cover childcare expenses, meaning that she had to personally fund the £45 nursery fee for an extra day of childcare. This additional expense was 'annoying' and P12 noted that this was 'absorbable, but ... on a regular basis it wouldn't be' (P12, interview). This financial consideration combined with a second consideration relating to P12's household schedule. As she explained, 'I only tend to attend events that are on the days when I do have childcare, just because it's simpler'. This second consideration was a common concern across the four full-time funded doctoral participants in the study – namely that being a full-time doctoral student resulted in perceived schedule flexibility. P12's account included several discussions of work patterns and covering care. She even noted in the basic details section of the diary form about the conference location: '[My university] campus, however I usually work at home so it is unusual for me to travel to campus'. She rationalised working from home: 'it makes more sense for me to stay at home', 'it's a bit of a faff travelling you know in rush hour and stuff, and it means that I can pick up the children' (P12, interview). While the enhanced flexibility meant that P12 could manage her caring responsibilities on a daily basis, this flexibility also resulted in P12 being *less motile* because the care routine was set up around P12 being the primary carer with high levels of availability. For instance, although her husband's work was relatively flexible, he left home each morning at 6:45. Nursery did not open until 7:45. The morning routine was entirely dependent on P12's morning availability – and she tried to avoid having to ask her mother to step in as she had to then have her to stay the night before, which also incurred extra care work for P12.

P12's doctoral status intersected with her caring responsibilities in two ways: she tried to avoid paying for extra days of childcare which could not be reimbursed using her doctoral funding, and she tried to avoid attending events that exceeded her usual care schedule, which was itself heavily dependent on her availability and flexibility as a full-time funded doctoral student.

Account 2: Available to drop everything?

The expectation of availability and flexibility extended to other forms of caring responsibility. 'In Two Places at Once' included forms of care that were not dependents – these forms of care are the most invisible from an institutional perspective (Moreau and Robertson, 2019), as they are often managed on an ad hoc basis. P7's care situation involved her sister, who was struggling with her own caring responsibilities, and her mother, who had just been diagnosed with cancer. As P7 narrated,

she [sister] suggested that I might like to come, she was going up to visit my mum, and she suggested that I might like to come with her rather than going

to the conference, and so I had to kind of say quite clearly that it was important to go to the conference.

(P7, interview)

For P7, the situation of a conference coinciding with a care-related incident encapsulated a wider issue relating to how she managed professional recognition from her family for her doctoral studies as a full-time funded student. As a career changer, she was already managing the change of pace and responsibility, where her stated strategy was that 'I try and think about it like a job where I'm expected to go in every day'. She felt she had to justify her ongoing studies to her family more than 'you might have to justify a more conventional, traditional job'. This conference became a symbolic moment where P7 felt she should establish boundaries and priorities for her ongoing management of her mother's condition, and was guarding against being seen as available to 'drop everything'. P7 saw this as having 'made some kind of statement ... to my family ... that somehow I have said that "the conference and my work was important" by going [to the conference]'. However, having made this statement, she then felt obliged to maintain virtual care support with her sister and mother throughout the conference, and as a result 'took in less' and 'felt ... half present'. After the conference, her mother and sister both asked how it had gone, and P7 stated that 'I wasn't sure there was anything I could say that would justify me not having gone [to her mother's house]'.

P7's example shows how full-time doctoral students can be seen as an available resource to be physically present for managing family crises in amongst situations of ongoing caring responsibilities, and how asserting a professional identity as a doctoral student can be both challenging and difficult to sustain.

Account 3: Time and money running out

For P2, flexibility appeared in similar ways to P12, in that P2 and her partner managed childcare for their three young children on an ongoing basis by booking regular days at nursery, which meant that P2's motility was affected by the challenge of adding extra childcare into both the family budget and schedule. Moreover, P2 and her husband were both originally from another country and could not call upon grandparents to assist with childcare, so, as P2 stated, 'I have no replacement' (P2 interview). P2's husband was a freelance worker, which meant they could share childcare more equally due to his enhanced flexibility, but also resulted in periods of intense activity with less flexibility. Finally, there were ongoing financial concerns due to his freelance work status and her status as a doctoral student in the final stage of her studies.

The fact that P2 was in the final stages of her doctoral studies had two related financial implications. First, she had no conference funding remaining. Second, her doctoral stipend was coming to an end. As such, she urgently needed to locate possibilities for her career to alleviate the family's financial concerns, and saw this conference as an important venue to improve her career prospects. She therefore decided to self-fund attending the conference in Denmark. This involved a serious

financial discussion with her husband, with implications for family activities resulting from using these funds from the communal budget for her expenses and extra days at nursery. Some aspects of the conference were unaffordable, such as the conference dinner, and other expenses were reduced by sharing an Air BnB property with other doctoral students. The principal challenge of attending this conference was the huge pressure on the conference to deliver results for her career. Referring to the intangible benefits of conferences (Edelheim et al., 2018), P2 was aware that the conference was unlikely to lead directly to future employment. However, the family investment in the conference meant that her husband had expectations of concrete outcomes from the conference, and this pressure was even enhanced by questions from her husband's sister. While at the conference, P2 frenetically engaged in all possible activities, stating, 'I sort of forced myself to do all these things'. At the end of the conference, there were no direct outcomes. P2 'changed [her] discourse a little bit to raise some hope' when reporting on the conference to her husband.

Overall P2's example is characterised by two eventualities related to her doctoral status: her conference funding being exhausted at the time that her stipend was also coming to an end. The conference became a site of shared family investment where unrealistic expectations were placed on the conference. As P2 noted, 'it's not only me doing things for me' (P2, interview); this conference was a family affair.

Account 4: Enhanced constraints as a sole parent/doctoral researcher

P14's account was characterised by her status as a sole parent, which was accompanied by serious financial constraints and challenges of managing the care of her five-year-old child. Her ex-partner was not used to being called upon to manage irregular or emergency care situations. He cared for their child on alternate weekends, but otherwise she had full care responsibility. Her parents lived in the same city but were only available to assist with childcare on weekends or to cover pick-up time if arranged in advance. P14 also had a limited network of other parents to call upon because she used wrap-around care – i.e. before- and after-school clubs – for her daughter, so said that she never experienced the school-gates conversations (seen in this way as a potential space for bonding with other parents and carers). P14 attended a conference on her university campus for this study. Even attending the one-day event on campus had been challenging, as at that time she could not own a car, so used multiple forms of public transport with unreliable connections to reach campus. This meant that she had to get the timing right to pick up her child from after school club, including contingency time for the transport connections, because she had no emergency back-up. She left early, missed the end of the conference and the post-conference drinks. Due to the nature of her commute, she had no opportunity to write down her reflections from the day, and then had to move directly into childcare; she forgot the ideas she had developed at the event before she could write them down.

P14's financial concerns were related to both her doctoral funding and the availability of conference funding. Her doctoral status meant that she had no access to benefits for childcare assistance, and her stipend limited the amount of childcare she could afford. She saw this interim financial insecurity as a means of moving towards a better job and more secure financial conditions for her and her child. This resonates with P2's comment 'it's not only me doing things for me'. P14's specific doctoral funding meant that she had no access to conference funding in her first year. Yet, as shown in the excerpt from P14's interview in the previous section, she saw conferences as a compulsory part of her PhD. As such, at that time, she was only attending events which were free and/or which were 'worth it'. She was aware that, if she wanted to self-fund attending a conference, she may have to forego a holiday that year; she had already made this choice prior to starting her doctorate.

P14 shows how doctoral funding conditions are challenging for sole parents due to the lack of officially recognised income and the resultant lack of access to childcare support – as well as the issue of the doctoral stipend being designed to support an individual, not a family unit.

(Hook, 2016)

Account 5: Full-time academic, part-time doctoral student...and carer

The final account presents a contrast with the other full-time funded doctoral researchers in the study. P11 was a full-time senior lecturer and a part-time PhD student. She and her partner had intended to share care of their two children equally, but P11 had moved into academia from another profession 13 years earlier and her request for a job share had been turned down. She was a reluctant full-time academic, and her account was threaded through with emotional guilt; she reflected in her conference diary that she sent texts to her partner due to 'Guilt re not being there' (P11, diary). She already felt that she did so little in the house that going away from home was an unacceptable added burden on her partner. She asked her partner to leave all the washing up for her to do when she returned home. P11 worked for six hours on her PhD for one day each weekend. As noted in the above section, P11 felt obliged to attend two sets of conferences: one for her lecturer role (delivering an accredited professional qualification) and one as a doctoral student. In this case, the conference she had attended was for her lecturer role. However, upon returning from the conference, she decided not to study for her PhD that weekend, with the professional conference replacing her doctoral time. It was clear that these (her academic job and PhD student status) were competing priorities along with caring responsibilities. After the conference, P11 opted to carry out chores in the house and also make herself available in the communal areas of the house to catch up with her partner and children. On top of the ongoing management of job, doctorate and nuclear family was the situation where P11's elderly aunt was approaching the end of her life. Communicating about these developments dominated the conference, as P11 discussed her aunt's condition with her cousin and partner, and her own partner in relation to planning a visit

to see her aunt the following weekend, thus adding another kind of trip to the aftermath of attending the conference. A further knock-on effect was managing P11's volunteering responsibilities, where there was also a care issue relating to an unwell colleague and the resultant requirement for P11 to sustain the volunteering activities.

While the other doctoral researchers' accounts portrayed in this chapter were all marked by financial constraints and reliance on their flexibility/availability in terms of managing everyday care (with low motility), this contrasting account is important as a reminder of the variation of ways in which doctoral studies combine with caring responsibilities. Financial concerns were not mentioned in this account – the concerns were relating to time pressure and the emotional guilt of managing the competing priorities of doctoral studies with academic work and family responsibility.

Discussion

The analysis in this chapter has shown that doctoral students with caring responsibilities share the same expectations of attending conferences as doctoral students in general, and that gaining professional experience via conferences may even be more important for doctoral students with caring responsibilities, due to enhanced pressure to provide for dependents. Three of the five accounts of doctoral student participants from the 'In Two Places at Once' study revealed issues relating to financial constraints. These related to conditions of doctoral funding, where the stipend is relatively low, and the stipend is also not counted as official taxable income (meaning that it is often not counted as income for credit schemes, national insurance contributions, mortgages or tenancy agreements). Operating with a reduced income meant that doctoral students were less able to fund extra costs such as conference attendance – and were less able to fund the extra childcare necessitated by attending conferences. A second set of financial constraints was directly tied to conditions for conference funding. One participant had exhausted her conference allowance at the time that she most needed to attend conferences; another did not have access to conference funding when she was eager to start going to conferences – conference funding did not seem to align with doctoral stage, and, importantly, did not cover childcare.

In addition to financial constraints, a second consideration emerged for four of the participants, in relation to schedule flexibility and availability. As full-time funded doctoral students, family members relied on these participants both to cover everyday care and to provide crisis support. For three of these participants, their motility was impacted by their ongoing caring responsibilities due to the difficulty of replacing these participants' significant role in the family care routine. A previous paper emerging from this study (Henderson, 2020b), which used Hochschild and Machung's (2012) work on gendered care and household management, theorised 'sticky care' as a way of recognising the logistical and emotional attachments that result in gendered, care-related reduction of motility for academics with caring responsibilities. In this chapter, the analysis has added a

layer to this formulation, in that being a full-time funded doctoral student seems to reinforce the 'sticky' conditions of being a primary carer by legitimising a stay-at-home parental role. Conversely, the contrasting case of P11, who was a full-time academic as well as a part-time doctoral student, presents a case where being a doctoral student as well as an academic instead reinforces the breadwinner role (Hochschild and Machung, 2012), where the added professional responsibility of the doctorate leads to further reliance on the primary carer to manage the household. In either case, arguably doctoral studies enter into household and family management in a way that reinforces binarised care roles of breadwinner and primary carer. The consolidation of these roles was revealed through the exploration of conference attendance, as attending a conference constitutes a break in the care routine, an added burden in terms of finance and care, thus exposing everyday roles and expectations within doctoral students' care situations.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to explore how doctoral students who have caring responsibilities manage attending conferences – and what marks out their negotiations of conference attendance from other doctoral students and from academics with caring responsibilities. It has shown that doctoral students' motivations for attending conferences align with the expectations of doctoral students in general, with the added expectation of participating in conferences as an action that will assist with future career success for the benefit of the whole family. While the challenges of negotiating conference attendance as a carer were similar to the challenges faced by all academics who have caring responsibilities (Henderson et al., 2018), there were some specific facets that were specific to doctoral students. In particular, this related (i) to financial constraints relating to doctoral studentships and to conference funding for doctoral students, and (ii) to expectations of doctoral student availability/flexibility in relation to ongoing everyday care (with resultant reduced motility) and family crisis management. In relation to (i), there are considerations to bear in mind for doctoral research funders and institutions who disburse studentships and conference funding, in relation to the possibility of claiming care bursaries, and also paying up front for conferences rather than via reimbursement. In relation to (ii), the connection between availability/flexibility, care and motility is a wider sociological concern which is important to be aware of in structuring doctoral programmes (including making them more structured and therefore legitimising doctoral studies as a professional role) and also making allowances for doctoral students with caring responsibilities. Three of the participants in the study referred to feeling different and excluded on the basis of having already established a family before embarking on doctoral studies.

Finally, this chapter demonstrates the heterogeneity of the category of doctoral student with caring responsibilities. The chapter presented participant accounts from heterosexual couples with children, a lesbian couple with and without children, and a sole parent; the chapter also included ongoing, dependent caring responsibilities (children, pets) as well as other forms of care (aunt, sister, mother, volunteering activities). For each participant, care and doctoral studies played out

differently in relation to the circumstances they were living in – and these circumstances determined how conference attendance was negotiated. Future work in this area will need to consider how doctoral students with caring responsibilities manage attending virtual conferences; we know that online spaces have been important for academics with caring responsibilities before the COVID-19 pandemic (Black et al., 2020), but this will certainly be a new direction to explore in relation to the findings presented in this chapter.

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12 Conclusion

Genine Hook, Marie-Pierre Moreau, and Rachel Brooks

Student Carers in Higher Education: Navigating, Resisting and Redefining Academic Cultures draws on international perspectives of care in higher education. Our focus on care is critical to the development of academic cultures which are inclusive. Care-free, gendered norms remain firmly in place within the academy where the idea of the ideal worker and/or students 'continues to be seen as one with no interests or responsibilities outside of work' (Bailyn, 2003, p. 141). This profoundly disadvantages those with caring responsibilities, particularly women and other minoritised groups. As argued by Grummel and colleagues, caring remains acutely gendered as women continue to contribute the vast majority of primary care regardless of class, age, family/cultural background and employment:

While women in the higher education sector could not ignore care work, especially in the private sphere, men could and did. The theme of care, children and time conflicts was not part of our conversations with men unless we specifically introduced the subject. This indifference to care issues is implicitly supported by the culture of the public sphere [such as the academy].

(Grummell et al., 2009, p. 195)

This contribution to scholarly understandings of care in higher education is also timely. The widening participation and lifelong learning agendas, which are evident in a range of countries, have often failed to engage with student carers in ways which have facilitated their inclusion in academic cultures. Instead, more often than not, deficit discourses underpinning national and institutional policies have rendered invisible and misrecognised student carers, with a range of implications. Taylor and colleagues, for example, note that 'A lack of awareness of carers or their recognition at HEIs can leave students in the dark about their rights and support available to them' (Taylor et al., 2021, p. 11).

The editors of this edited collection seek to contribute and build further momentum towards examining the gendered experiences of carers within academic cultures. Following the observations of Andrew and colleagues, we concur that the

influence of gender on the university journey of an increasing population of mature-age women students is relatively neglected and women student

such as those involved in this research continue to experience significant challenges.

(Andrew et al., 2020, p. 11)

In what Moreau (2014) understands as a ‘pattern of invisibility’, higher education institutional practices and policies often ignore care work in all its aspects (see Lynch, in this volume), starting with failing to collect information on the caring responsibilities of students, even when information on other key identity markers are collected. Despite repeated calls for the collection of such data (NUS, 2009, 2013), rare are the HE institutions which do so. Instead, some rely on the broad category of ‘mature-aged students’, a category which only partly overlaps with those of student carers. This dearth of data hinders a nuanced and informed understandings of the distinct experiences of student carers and an effective policy intervention, whether at national or institutional level. This edited collection responds to the invisibility and misrecognition of care in the academy and reflects on the preceding two decades of scholarship on student carers. This work paves the way for the next wave of research and insights into how university students navigate institutional conditions and their care-full lives.

Resisting the ‘ideal’, care-free student and calling for care-centric academic cultures

In this conclusion, we seek to tease out some of the key themes emerging from the book’s diverse contributions rather than summarise the findings chapter by chapter (the latter is provided in the introductory chapter). While the development of ‘care-centric’ or ‘care-free’ cultures is a concern central to most of the chapters in this volume, Kathleen Lynch’s chapter focuses on this social imperative, calling for resistance to the culture of carelessness. Lynch’s chapter does not only draw attention to the complexity of participation for many student carers but also advocates for a ‘care-centric’ higher education. While the carefreeness of academic cultures is not a recent phenomenon, it has been perpetuated and possibly exacerbated by, on the one hand, the marketisation of HE and related rhetoric of individualism (see Lynch, in this volume) and, on the other hand, increased cuts to social care provision associated with so-called austerity politics characteristic of many national policy agendas (Moreau, 2016; see also Sallee et al.’s contribution in this volume). The chapters gathered in this volume remind us of the significance of the work remaining, for the higher education sector to value richly care both within the academy and across our broader communities.

Throughout this volume, this concern for social change and resistance constitutes a central thread as several chapters highlight how student carers negotiate and resist the care-free norms of academia, although this often comes at a (financial, health, emotional and/or academic) cost.

Burford and Mitchell, in particular, highlight how doctoral students often experience and negotiate the conflicts between expectations of intensive-motherhood and the autonomous, care-free research student despite being mostly left out of widening participation policies. This chapter reminds us to include all

students in our thinking about care and the academy, in place of the current limited focus on first-year and other undergraduate students, and also that more experienced students, such as those completing doctoral studies, can also experience tension when engaging with higher education and caring responsibilities. Burford and Mitchell's contribution encourages us to imagine care as embedded in doctoral education and higher education more broadly, rather as an outlier or an attachment that is out-of-place in the academy. O'Shea's offering continues to highlight the possibilities and strengths for first-in-family student-parents demonstrating persistence in managing the gendered expectations of women's labour within higher education. This confirms the complex negotiations student carers make in order to participate in higher education and also ways that many student carers reshape narratives of success.

Smith's chapter builds on this key theme within this collection, highlighting the negotiations and resilience of student carers enrolled on Foundation degrees as they engage with and build their own sense of success within higher education. This is echoed by Margaret Sallee and colleagues, in a contribution which builds on the ways scholars reshape constructions of success for student carers that extend beyond completion and themselves towards providing financially and role modelling educational engagement and success for their children and families. Sallee and colleagues issue a timely reminder that the benefits of higher education qualifications can be critical to students as well as their extended families but that these benefits are negotiated through complex and diverse obstacles which are perceived as extra-academic, including food security, childcare and financial disadvantage.

Academic norms and carers' identities: intersectionality and diversity

When research has been conducted on student carers, it has rarely engaged with the diversity and intersectionality of the ways academic norms frame, or even compound, their experiences. This concern for intersectionality is perhaps best exemplified by Cao, who explores the experience of postgraduate education by international students who also have caring responsibilities for children and extended family. Cao broadens our conception of care, with an exploration of care as a parent and caring for older generations including parents and grandparents. This broader and intergenerational understanding of care also has cultural and structural implications for what can be at stake for many students, including international students. Such considerations of intersectionality also point to the blurring of the boundaries between care-giving and care-receiving, and to how we are embroiled at all times in multiple relations of care which are mediated, among other things by gender, sexuality, race, dis/ability and social class (Moreau and Robertson, 2019).

Cox and Pidgeon's critical contribution to this edition is to focus on Indigeneity and the complex burden of colonisation of academic institutions for First Nations students who are also carers. This builds on the intent of *Student Carers in Higher Education: Navigating, Resisting and Redefining Academic Cultures* to highlight the (constrained) agency of students to combine care and university studies and

succeed. The positioning of student carers at the intersection of several power relations is also richly illustrated in the chapter by Browne, McDonagh and Clark, as they explore the diverse and multifaceted experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students entering UK higher education. Drawing on both existing research studies and literature, as well as auto-ethnographic insights and reflections, the authors examine the conditions outside and away from campus and classes, including caring for siblings, children and tended communities for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students. These contributions also remind us that studying student carers requires us to engage with the multiple disadvantages they face, as well as the privileges some of them enjoy, whether in relation to being middle-class, white and/or abled (Moreau and Kerner, 2015; Moreau and Robertson, 2019).

Negotiating spaces of participation: beyond a rhetoric of access

Another theme of this volume centres on the problematisation of student carers' participation in HE. While, in many countries, policy agendas have often focused on the recruitment of so-called under-represented groups, the contributions to this book highlight how student carers' participation is always constrained and contingent as they navigate spaces which are, in the main, geared towards the care-free. Henderson's contribution provides a vivid illustration of this aspect, by examining the wider academic context within which care takes place. Henderson draws on academic conferences to shape a critical overview of how higher education practices can develop care-sensitive strategies. By focusing on academic conferences and care, our collection extends the context and field of vision for care to be held in critical view, for all students and in all conditions throughout higher education. Hook extends the thinking of where care shapes the conditions for students to participate in higher education. This chapter focuses on university on-campus spaces that enable student carers to combine parenting and university study. Hook's chapter challenges higher education institutions to rethink the gesture of on-campus childcare that can complicate the capacity of student-parents to navigate university spaces, arguing that institutional offerings to support students who care can also be problematic and restrictive. This integration of the margins is also reflected in the provision in place in many countries. For example, Moreau and Kerner's study of England-based national and HE institutional policies showed that while most student-parents concentrate in postgraduate education, the provision available to student-parents is often limited to undergraduates (Moreau and Kerner, 2015).

Thinking beyond access requires us to engage with the multifaceted dimensions of carers' experiences, including aspects related to economic, cultural, political and affective justice (Fraser, 1997; Lynch, 2010). In particular, in some academic and policy circles, 'Affective relations of love, care and solidarity are defined as peripheral to education' (Lynch, this volume), but need not be. This also requires us to rethink the ontological, epistemological and empirical frameworks, which often, like the spatio-temporal norms of academia, position care at the margins (see Hook's contribution in this volume on the geographies of childcare). O'Shea's contribution in this volume reminds us that these dimensions also

intersect and, for example, that the spatial and material conditions of higher education ‘are translated at a deeply embodied level’.

Concluding comments

Our aim in illuminating the global experiences of carers in higher education has been to examine the care-free norms of academic cultures in diverse contexts and to build on the momentum of the existing scholarship. This book seeks to offer a timely review of the strategies and policies that higher education institutions have implemented over the past 20 years, since care in the academy emerged as a critical area of equity and inclusion for higher education. In doing so, we provide an additional layer of depth and scope to academic knowledge by highlighting the carefree norms that operate in academia and, related to this, the particular experiences of diverse student carers, embedded with the daily operations of academia, rather than relying on broader institutional practices. It is the context-specific experiences such as food insecurity and conferences that provide directions for higher education policies and practices to adjust to the needs and desires of their students. It is also the particular experiences of, to quote only a few, Indigenous students, Chinese sole parents and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students that illustrate the richly diverse nature of students who care. On a political level, to avoid reproducing a view of the HE student as a ‘bachelor boy’ (Hinton-Smith, 2012) requires linking the care agenda to other political agendas and social movements, including, for example, Black Lives Matters.

The ten substantive chapters that comprise this collected edition reflect the educational and care-full experiences of students who are often invisible within higher education. These chapters expose the culture of ‘carelessness’ within higher education, and help to reposition care at the centre of the university system. By doing so, the editors and chapter authors seek to harness the opportunity for and responsibility of the higher education sector to address the needs of students who care. This collected work builds critical awareness of the complexity for many student carers of participating in higher education systems in meaningful ways. Our aim is also to foreground the possibilities and ethics of building momentum towards a ‘care-centric’ higher education, where care is embedded into the people, spaces and temporalities of the university.

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