

## **R1.2 Beaumaris Lounge Friday 7 December 9.00-11.00**

### ***Capturing the minutiae of mobility: using diary method to research the conference experiences of academics with caring responsibilities (0187)***

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Conferences remain an under-researched phenomenon within the higher education research field (Henderson, 2015), and issues of inequality and conferences are no exception. There have been a number of studies relating to access to conferences, which have used survey methods to examine gender inequality (e.g. Eden, 2016) and 'international' representation (e.g. Derudder and Liu, 2016) at conferences. However the experiences of academics while at conferences remain clouded in mystery. This presentation is based on a project which set out to understand more about how academics experience conferences, following a previous study that uncovered some of these issues (Henderson, 2018b). The project, entitled 'In Two Places at Once', researched the impact of caring responsibilities on academics' access to and participation in conferences (Henderson, forthcoming). The objective of the study was to feed data on this specific aspect of academic practice into wider studies of academia and care (Hook, 2016; Moreau and Robertson, 2017). The study used the diary-interview method to capture the minutiae of how academics with caring responsibilities balance their roles as conference delegate and carer. Each research participant completed a time-log for one conference; the time-log gathered information predominantly on communications with caring responsibilities or co-carers. The time-log included free-text boxes where participants filled in details of their preparatory and catch-up care work for the conference, and also further reflections. The time-log then provided the basis for the post-conference interview, and experiences of that conference were then compared with participants' other conference experiences.

This then is an example of a study which used the diary method for a short, intensive data collection period of one or a few days. After introducing the study and the diary method used, the presentation discusses the challenges and risks of using the diary method in this context. While it is not unusual to conduct time-use research on a short period (Mullan, 2018; Sullivan and Gershuny, 2017), conferences are not just any short period – the intensity of conference activity, and the associated difficulties of finding time to manage care (which, after all, were the focus of this study), meant that participants were faced with tough choices about how to factor in their participation in the study. These challenges were discussed in the interviews, and they raise both practical and ethical issues. The quality and quantity of information submitted was hugely varied. There were ethical questions about further burdening participants who were by nature already under heavy pressure while at the conference. Ultimately, however, the diary research produced invaluable data that has led to a policy briefing on developing a care-friendly policy (Henderson, 2018a). The presentation ends with a discussion of how short, intensive diaries could be applied in other aspects of higher education research.