

### **R1.3 Beaumaris Lounge Friday 7 December 9.00-11.00**

#### ***Reading the Personal: Troubling everyday encounters within women doctoral students' research diaries (0222)***

**Rachel Handforth**<sup>1</sup> *Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom*

Drawing on my longitudinal research with women PhD students, this presentation explores the opportunities and challenges of using research diaries with participants, showing how diary data generated a deeply contextualized understanding of participants' everyday experiences of doctoral study, and generated insight into the temporal complexities of their shifting aspirations. Further, in this presentation I consider the affective experience of engaging in diary-based research as an insider-researcher (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009), the challenges of engaging with data which is inherently confessional (Harvey, 2011), and the ethical complexities that researchers face in analysing data of this nature.

Despite literature highlighting persistent inequalities in doctoral study (Brown and Watson, 2010; Carter, Blumenstein and Cook, 2013), and within post-PhD career trajectories (Wellcome Trust, 2013), little attention has been paid to women doctoral students' everyday experiences, with empirical work largely involving one-off interviews with individuals. Yet analysing the minutiae of seemingly mundane everyday encounters enables connections to be drawn between the personal and the political; between the everyday and wider structural issues within academia, such as gender discrimination. My findings highlight how attending to the everyday within research diaries often revealed the exclusionary practices which operate at the micro-level, and which positioned women doctoral students as 'outsiders' in the academy (White, 2013).

Participants' research diaries were kept for the duration of the doctorate, meaning their everyday experiences were documented over a number of years. These diaries captured data of a considerably different character to data gathered during interviews, enabling access to experiences which may not have otherwise been voiced (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Analysis illuminated incidents which showed the marginalization that some individuals experienced within particular spaces, including offices, labs and academic departments, though participants often did not share these everyday encounters within our interviews. Attending to research diary data thus enabled insight into the lived experiences of participants, and highlighted that some academic cultures continue to have implications for women's ability to feel a sense of belonging (Becher and Trowler, 2001).

This presentation makes a valuable contribution to discussions about utilising research diaries within higher education research, highlighting the opportunities, tensions and challenges of using this method within empirical work. Further, drawing on data from my work with women doctoral students, it argues that attending to the everyday can produce new insights into the doctoral experience, and to the gendered politics of the neoliberal academy.