

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

0275

Tue 07 Dec 2021

15:20 - 15:40

Diaries of a Pandemic: Reading and Revisualising the Spatial Implications for Gender Equality in Academia

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Research Domain: Academic practice, work, careers and cultures (AP)

Abstract: The SRHE-funded research project: *Dear Diary: Equality implications for female academics of changes to working practices in lockdown and beyond*, explores female academics' experiences of living and working throughout the pandemic and implications for productivity, career and gender equality. The project's hybrid methodology combines diary research and semi-structured interview; the 'diary, diary-interview method' or DDIM (Zimmerman and Weider 1977). This paper will be presented towards the end of the 12-month project and will report on three phases of data collection (two diary entries, one interview) analysed through a feminist geographical lens highlighting concepts of space, place and power. The paper will also comment on the development of the project's illustrated digital archive, featuring researcher-generated illustrations which interpret and revisualise themes and issues emerging from the data.

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This project builds on previous research (Carruthers Thomas 2020) which investigated experiences of university staff living and working at home during the first COVID-19 lockdown (March-June 2020) and the role of gender in shaping those experiences. Those findings showed that female staff (employed in both academic and professional services roles) were less likely to have access to dedicated working space at home; more likely to take primary or sole responsibility for homeschooling, household tasks and others' care needs, and more likely to report that working from

home in lockdown had impacted on their capacity to maintain work-life balance and work/home boundaries. Female academic staff were also more likely to report a negative impact on their capacity to conduct research and write for publication. This was particularly acute for those with school-age children. These findings reflect inequalities highlighted in a rapidly emerging literature (Boncori 2020; Fazackerley 2020; Kitchener 2020 *inter alia*).

Women have continued to carry the burden of a highly fluid and uncertain situation throughout a second lockdown and the imposition of variable restrictions. The pandemic has thrown longstanding gender inequalities in the sector into even sharper relief. Given that academic careers are characterised by unforgiving markers of specific productivities at specified career stages, the interaction of working from home and carrying the burden of care over such an extended period, will potentially damage career progression in the longer term. The *Dear Diary* project's intention is to foreground the voices of female academics reaching for 'sweaty concepts, generated by trying to describe something that is difficult, that resists being fully comprehended in the present ... a description of not being accommodated by a world' (Ahmed 2017 p.12).

The project methodology builds on Zimmerman and Weider's foundational anthropological tool of DDIM (the diary, diary-interview method). 25 participants, female academics at diverse career stages in UK universities, were recruited via purposive sampling. Each participant submitted two diary entries; the first (May 2021), was retrospective, reflecting on experiences of living and working during the pandemic since March 2020. The second (July 2021), focused on current working practices. Participants were invited to submit their entries in textual, visual, audio or video formats, or in a combination of media. Individual interviews revisited diary entries for clarification and contextualisation and further probed emerging themes.

Data analysis will seek to identify primary themes emerging from participants' accounts of and reflections on, their experiences and to consider the immediate and longer-term implications for gender equality and working practices in the sector. The analysis will be underpinned by themes of space, power and gender, particularly as these interact within Massey's concept of power geometry (2005) ie: the ways in which different social groups and individuals are positioned in distinct ways in relation to flows and interconnections of power. Close attention will be paid to reading the 'spatial' in the data; examining the shifting and blurring of boundaries between work and home, the spatial expression and experience of inequalities and the stretching and shrinking of spaces between individuals, families, colleagues, students and workplaces.

A second strand of analysis involves revisualising data, 'that is transforming research data, visual or otherwise into new multimodal creative outputs' (Mannay, 2019, p.659) through researcher-generated illustrations. This is a process of 'immersion in and entanglement with the minutiae of the data' (McLure, 2013, pp.174-175). The illustrations will be included in an interactive digital archive. The conference presentation will provide examples of the archive and reflect on this practice of graphic social science and its potential for both widening engagement with the findings and contributing to strategic discussions of overarching challenges in relation to HE practices and gender equality.

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