

Symposia Abstract Book - Main Abstract Book with Submissions and Programme (All Symposia)

Care-full lives: Exploring the experiences of doctoral student carers (0146)

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Rationale Text: Over the past several decades there has been growing recognition of student carers as educational subjects who encounter particular inequalities surrounding educational access, participation, retention, and success. Growing interest in doctoral student-carers is visible in recently published work (Hook, 2016; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020), including autoethnographic pieces written by former and current doctoral carers (e.g. Lipton, 2019). To date, much of the literature at the intersection of doctoral education and care has focused on care for children (see Abdellatif & Gatto, 2020; Danna Lynch, 2008). However, there have also been accounts of doctoral students who care for parents and other family members (e.g. Maher, Ford & Thompson, 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 & Hook, 2019), and work which examines doctoral care across a complex matrix of intersecting identities (Abdellatif & Gatto, 2020). Across studies on doctoral student carers' experiences, researchers have sought to problematise the "default construction of the university student as carefree" (Moreau & Kerner, 2015, p. 215) and account for the 'care-full' lives many students live. There are several arguments for increasing the profile of research on doctoral student carers. Firstly, this area of research is extremely timely given the unequal impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on doctoral students. Graduate student advocacy groups have argued that parents and other carers have experienced significant disruptions during COVID-19 (e.g. due to schooling from home), and have been given insufficient support and extensions to time/funding in recognition of this 'lost' time during their doctoral studies (Munro & Heath, 2021). Secondly, there has been a growth of institutional equity and diversity policies which specifically address carers (e.g. Supporting staff with caring responsibilities, La Trobe University, 2021), and it is important that researchers assess the impacts and limitations of these policies. A third strand running through this symposium relates to the need to better understand how 'care' is defined, both in terms of who is recognisable as a 'caring' subject and who (and what) may be recognisable as a subject of care. This international symposium offers a timely contribution, showcasing current research on doctoral student carers from a variety of methodological perspectives.

Linked Submissions:

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Exploring Care-full Doctoral Subjectivities: The Experience of the Doctoral-Student-Mother in Doctoral Education (0318)

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

Paper Abstract: In this paper we closely analyse two self-portraits and related diary-interview data produced via empirical research in New Zealand in order to explore the discursive space which surrounds carers in doctoral education. In our analysis of the visual artifacts of one participant named ‘Gertie’, we identify the significance of parental care in shaping her doctoral experience, and consider 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 analysis reveals how Gertie, as a doctoral student-mother, is squeezed between these two seemingly contradictory discourses, causing her significant strain.

“It’s Not Only me Doing Things for me”: Conference Participation for Doctoral Students with Caring Responsibilities (0335)

Emily Henderson¹

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

Paper Abstract: Conferences are recognised to be vital spaces for the development of doctoral students, providing access to networks and knowledge and socialising researchers into academia. At the same time, it is recognised that for academics with caring responsibilities attending conferences is challenging, and there are particular challenges for doctoral students with caring responsibilities. This paper 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 on access to conferences for academics with caring responsibilities, this chapter is based on the analysis of the participants who were doctoral students. Drawing on diary-interview data, the analysis focuses on aspects of negotiating conference attendance and care which are highlighted in participants’ accounts as specific to or exacerbated by being a doctoral student.

| Mothers Undertaking Part-Time Doctoral Study: Experiences and Implications (0444)

| Sue Cronshaw¹, Peter Stokes², Alistair McCulloch³

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

| **Paper Abstract:** This paper draws on 35 in-depth interviews conducted across the North West of England to explore the experience of working student mothers undertaking part-time PhDs. Whilst the focus on PGRs is becoming more prominent in higher education literature, there has been little exploration of this particular cohort. There are strong social expectations about how women should behave (Smiler & Kubotera 2010; Stout 2018), these reflect constructions of traditional femininity (Leathwood & Read 2009) and the expectations laid on the role of mother (Rizzo, Schiffrin, & Liss, 2012; Chae 2014). It is within the confines of these expectations that working mothers in the UK embark on part-time PhDs. The role conflict, marginalisation and lack of support experienced by the women in this study caused feelings of guilt, anxiety and isolation. The paper explores the effect of these issues on the women's well-being and concludes with a number of recommendations.

| The Care-full Obfuscations of UK Doctoral Students (0475)

| Mollie Baker¹

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

| **Paper Abstract:** This paper introduces the notion of care-full obfuscations via an analysis of UK doctoral students's experiences. As observed in personal experience and ongoing research into the transition to parenthood and/or desired parenthood amongst academics, care-full obfuscations arise when doctoral candidates shroud their caring responsibilities so as to be perceived as reliable, professional and competitive. One unintended consequence of such obfuscation is “strategic ignorance” (McGoey, 2012), where institutions - purportedly unaware of the needs of their students ‐ act in ways that leave carers shouldering care responsibilities without appropriate support. From this, the paper turns attention to the ways in which doctoral programmes could become more accommodating, and whether doctoral students should have employment-like status in the UK with its associated parental benefits. Acknowledging the lack of empirical investigation into this area, the paper foregrounds a research pathway into the presence and possible resolution of care-full obfuscations.

