



‘In Two Places at Once’ Early Findings Event

SRHE, London, 4th July 2017, 1-4pm

Project funded by the UoW Research Development Fund

Project website

www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ces/research/current/twoplaces

Academic blog on conferences (Eds. Henderson & Burford)

conferenceinference.wordpress.com/

‘In Two Places at Once’

Academics, Care Constellations and the Challenges of Attending Conferences

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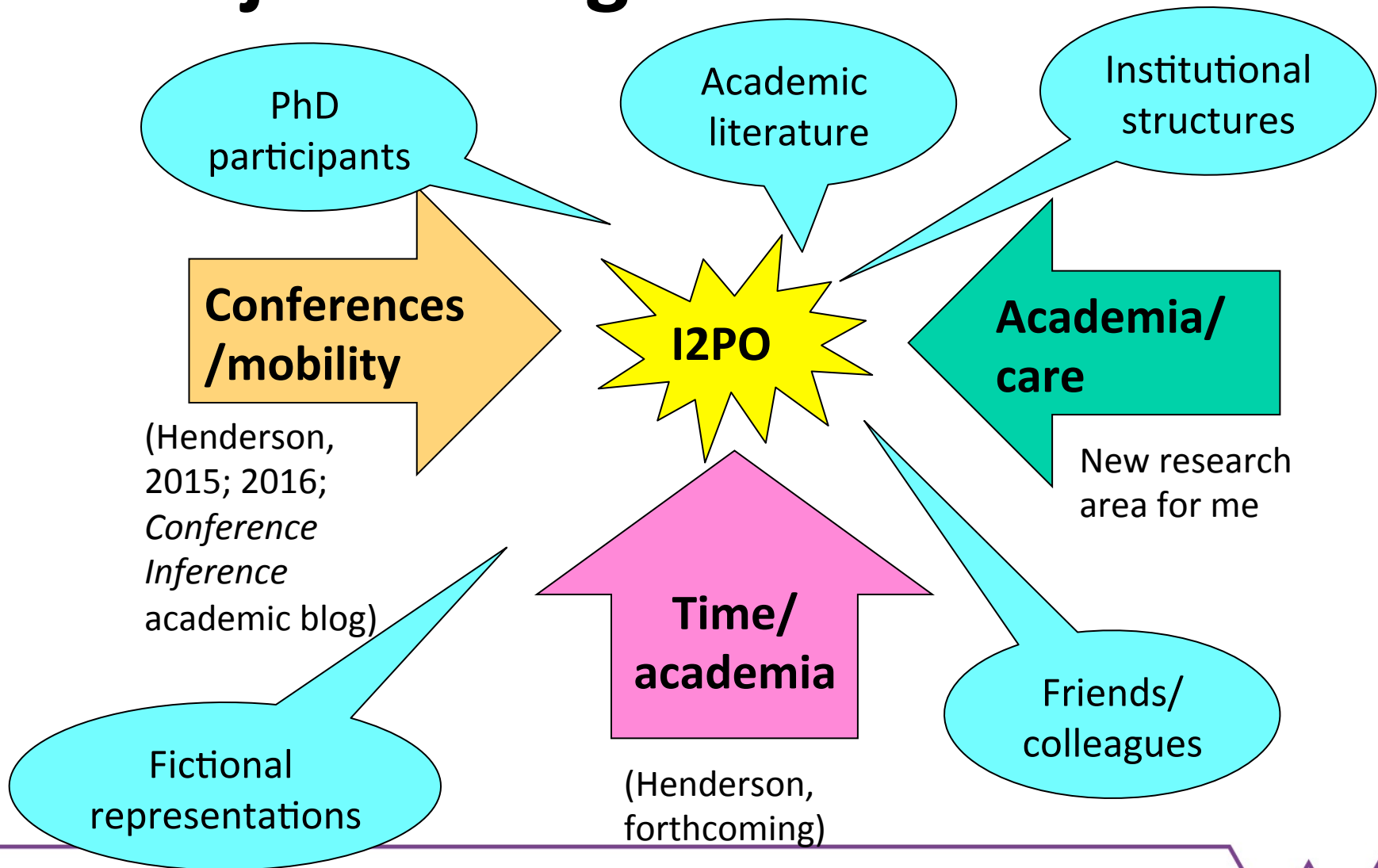
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This presentation...

- ▶ Project background, design and theoretical underpinnings
- ▶ Findings
- ▶ Recommendations
- ▶ Ongoing questions
- ▶ Responses from stakeholder group members
- ▶ Discussion/questions

Project Background



Project Background 2

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- ▶ Lack of research on conferences, despite billion-dollar value of industry (Rowe, doctoral work)
 - ▶ Emphasis on longer term mobility in studies on academic mobility
 - ▶ Conferences represented as BOTH
 - pointless/boring/unnecessary AND
 - vital for disseminating research/making (international) networks/collaborations
 - ▶ Conferences as spaces of marked inequality of access: border politics, funding, employment status, disability...caring responsibilities...
 - ▶ **Access to** conferences v. **access within** conferences (from *Beyond Access*, Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005)

Research questions

- ▶ **'How do academics' caring responsibilities affect their attendance of and participation in conferences?'**
 - What are the **specific factors** of caring responsibilities that impact upon academics' conference attendance/participation?
 - What are the **strategies** that academics employ to manage caring responsibilities while attending conferences? (Including support from the academic's institution or from the conference itself, as well as other sources of support).
 - Do these factors and strategies differ in relation to **international** travel for the purpose of attending conferences?

Theoretical underpinnings

“Academic”

- Self-identified
- Call for participants: ‘academic/researcher/teacher in Higher Education/student’
- Importance of including research students and those working in the ‘precariat’
- Gender/intersecting identity characteristics/wariness of identity categories

Time/subjectivity

- Time as external
- Academics chasing time
- Academics managing time
- Subjectivity formed in relation to illusion of managing time

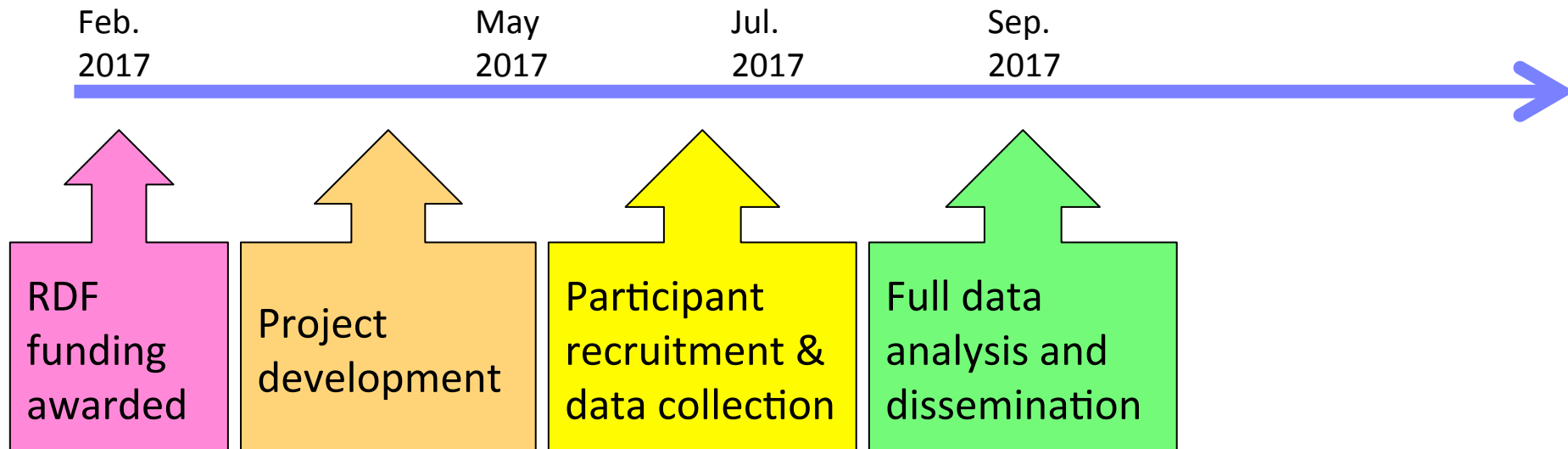
(Guzmán-Valenzuela & Barnett, 2013; Henderson, forthcoming; Lapping, 2016)

Care

- Importance of conceptualising academics
 - **Not** unencumbered individuals
 - **But** nodes in a network of relationships
- Self-defined
- Inclusive definition: ‘including children, parents and other relatives, pets, friends and kin’

(Hook, 2016; Jöns, 2011; Leemann, 2010; Moreau & Robertson, forthcoming; Ralph, 2016)

Project timeline



Research design

Stage 1: Pre-conference

- Determined conference travel dates/location/s
- Shared research instruments/consent

Why choose to focus on one conference?

Stage 2: Conference

- Questionnaire about arrangements and caring responsibilities for and after the conference
- Time-log of (i) contact with/about CRs, (ii) conversations about CRs, (iii) thoughts relating to CRs (Sullivan & Gershuny, 2017; Wigley, 2017)

Stage 3: Post-conference

- 1-hour interview
- Part I – questions on the time-log and about the conference
- Part II – questions about general conference attending practice/strategy

Did it affect participants' conference/care experience?

Participants

- ▶ 20 interview participants (+some questionnaire-only participants)
 - ▶ Mostly UK-based, also included Australia, Austria, US.
 - ▶ Range of nationalities/mobility trajectories.
 - ▶ Range of disciplines, mainly Social Sciences and Humanities.
 - ▶ Range of institutions and academic positions.
 - ▶ Different ethnicities, religions, relationship types; majority of participants are women.
 - ▶ Conferences ranged from a 1-day event on campus to 1 week+ including international travel to other continents.
 - ▶ Caring responsibilities varied hugely – more on this shortly...
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Findings: Access to Conferences 1

- ▶ Key considerations:
 - Can I get back if something happens? (Subjective scale)
 - What can I get away with?
 - Frequency
 - When was the last one
 - What else is going on
 - Guilt factor
 - Availability of care
 - Competing schedules/priorities (diary clash)
 - Booking with child/pet care
 - Availability of 'Plan B'/reliability of 'Plan A'
 - Sole parenting
 - Partner/support has illness/unpredictable job
 - Intersecting factors eg religion plus family commitments (travel restrictions in Judaism – P20)

I pulled out of one [conference] because the childcare arrangements were just too complicated, I just gave up, decided it wasn't worth going. (P17)

[The way in] which conferences work in [the country that I research] is if you're asked to go to a conference and you turn it down, you often don't get another invitation (p17)

Findings: Access to Conferences 2 – International v Domestic

► Key

considerations:

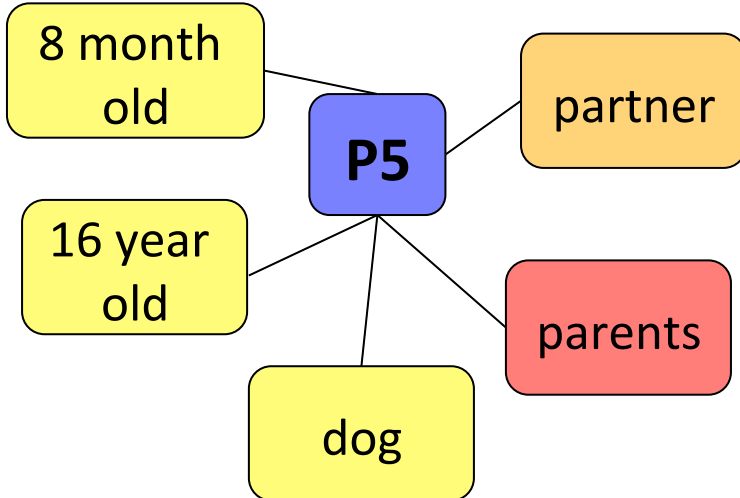
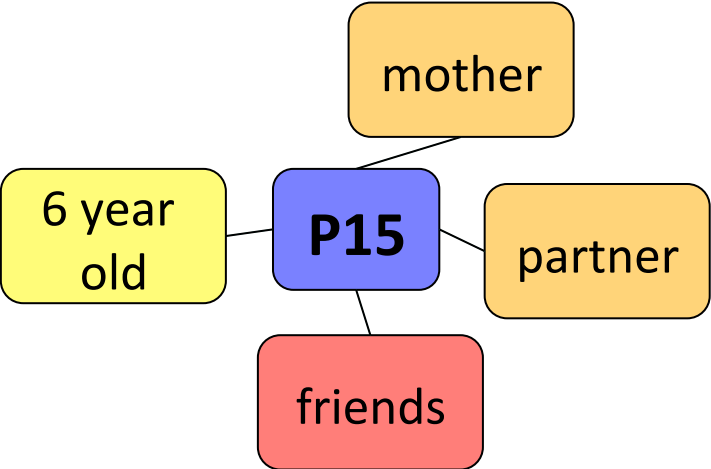
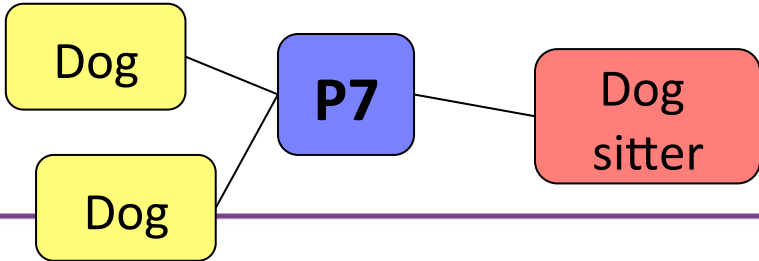
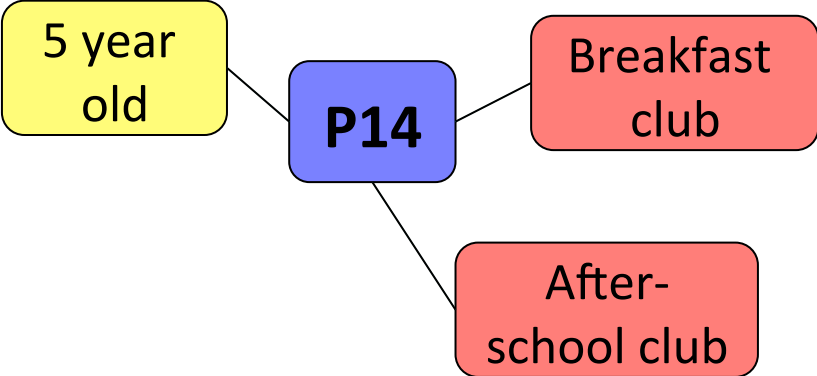
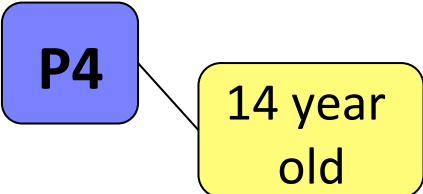
- Can I get back if something happens?
(Subjective scale)
- Jetlag
- Domestic can feel international and vice versa

I think I probably, I think I probably would have gone for no conference instead of [one in the US] (P15)

I think I would not go anywhere international at the moment that has jetlag implications...I was supposed to be going to a conference in [another continent] - and I'm not going(P5)

The thing that made me decide not to go [was] when my dog [...] didn't have long to live, because I thought if something happened to him, I [...] would have been up in [...] the north of Scotland, but it would have taken a hell of a long time to get back. (P13)

Findings: Care Constellations 1



Findings: Care Constellations 2

Change over time

I am not the primary parent and I am not the primary housekeeper.

So this was actually a little bit of an outlier conference for me in that my husband's grandmother was just diagnosed with cancer.

He has several very major work deadlines, he usually works part-time, he's actually bumped his hours up to full-time for this entire month (P20)

Effect of mobility

We live in [Country A], we are [from Country B]. My husband, he's a wonderful dad, he's a wonderful partner but he doesn't speak [the language of Country A] (P16)

Dual mobility

My partner was abroad so, she was in [another country] and she was about four and a half hours ahead, and this meant that I was thinking differently about when I could be in touch with her during the conference (P7)

Findings: More than Just a Few Days

Conference

Weeks/months before:

- Negotiate with partner/other support about dates
- Includes previous conferences attended/missed

Week/days before:

- Prepare for those staying behind
 - Food
 - Clothes
 - Instructions

Week/days after:

- Tiredness + lack of time to recover
- Unpacking
- Repairing damage/mess
- Paying bills
- Taking on extra duties to make up for being away

Weeks/months after:

- Partner takes a trip/holiday (bargaining)
- Negotiations for next conferences to attend/miss

Findings: 'In Two Places at Once' - Strategies

Strategies

- Communication
 - Phone-checking
 - Regular emails
 - Scheduled/regular calls
 - Goodnight catch-up
 - Breakfast family call
 - Exchanging photos/videos
- Back-up support
 - Schedule cleaner to come more/different day
 - Schedule extra childcare

Phone checking

- Keep in bag and check in breaks
- Keep on table but face down
- Keep on table, face up, on silent
- Keep in lap
- Observe others' level of phone use and emulate

Strategies break down

- Wifi dependence
- Waiting for responses

"It didn't help that [my partner] didn't reply when I sent a message to just be like, 'Everything okay this morning? Can I just have an update?' - and I wasn't able to ring him" (P5)

Findings: 'In Two Places at Once' – Managing the Unexpected

P16 – daughter's disaster haircut

P12 – bus didn't arrive to get home

"Her new bike had a puncture and it was just like, you know - we walked out of the house, and it was the last thing I needed, you know?" (P15)

P40 childminder's car in garage – child has to be dropped off

P47 – panic attack, couldn't get through to partner for support

P16 – daughter sent home ill from school

Findings: 'In Two Places at Once' – Managing Time

Missing parts of the Conference

- Cutting down time away
 - P16 overnight flight -> conference opening
- Leaving early
 - P14 – after school club
- Answering calls
 - P16 – ran out of keynote, daughter had forgotten time difference
- Weighing up making a call v. going to a presentation
 - P7 – time difference, opportunity for day-end catch up

Divided attention

I don't really like having my phone on silent so it's always kind of in the back of my mind, even though I try not to think about it (P12)

I felt quite distracted a lot I think, and once you stop focusing on like a keynote say, it's very hard to zone back into it (P5)

My mind wanders from the presentation and I think about my daughter and all the things I have to sort out for her new bedroom as we are moving house in 5 weeks (P14)

Findings: Is it Worth it?!

Useful for research

This one was particularly useful to really help my thinking in terms of analysis, and that's what I hoped it would be and it kind of came at the right stage (P12)

No choice?!

In our department, [attending this conference] it's like dead or alive. (P16)

Professional identity

It's good for my career and I was a hundred percent sure that I'm not ready to be just a housewife, stay home mum (P19)

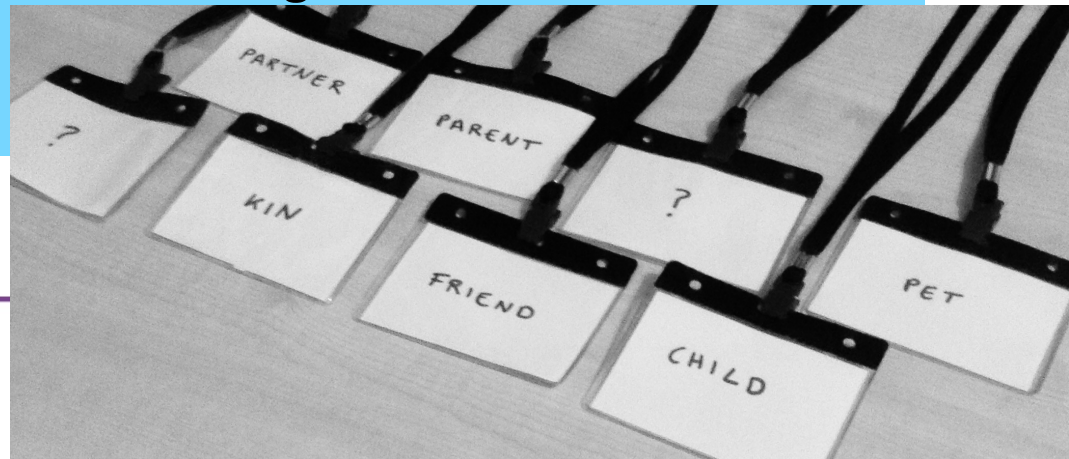
A close balance

I don't know [if it's worth it] and I think this part of been my withdrawal from conferences and stuff over the last few years has been that often, I've put an awful lot of effort into going and it hasn't been worth it.

- Presenting and feedback
 - Interesting papers (but already knew the work)
 - Met people in person after virtual contact
 - Helped to think through ideas
- Whether I got enough out of it, first of all, to have gone through what we did [...] I don't know [...] I would have said it's a close balance. (P15)

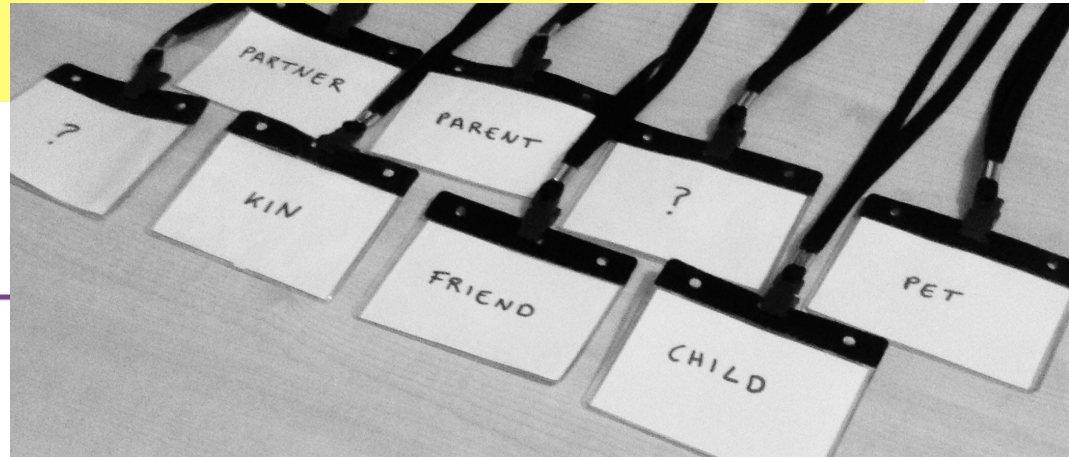
Recommendations

- ▶ Give people notice about conferences/seminars so they can plan
 - Two weeks' notice is not enough
 - Include social activities in the schedule (spontaneous activities are exclusionary)
- ▶ Shorter day/late start time
- ▶ Importance of a day rate
- ▶ Distance option/distance rate
- ▶ Care bursary (include pets)
- ▶ Childcare/child friendly space (older children) at conference
- ▶ Reliable, easy-access wifi
- ▶ Formalised day off day after returning



Ongoing Questions

- ▶ Whose responsibility is it that academics attend conferences?
 - Individual
 - HEI/institution (workplace)
 - Conference organiser
- ▶ Who could do what with the findings?
 - How to bear in mind the complexities of caring (rather than quick fix for most common issue)?
 - How to consider **access within** as well as **access to** conferences?



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