A close-up photograph of two hands, one larger and one smaller, clasped together in a supportive grip. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting. The hands are the central focus, with the fingers interlaced, conveying a sense of care and connection.

Performing mobile academic subjectivities in neoliberal times: Is care an equity issue?

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Introduction

- Why are care/ers invisible and/or misrecognised in HE policy and research circles?
- How do academics who are caregivers navigate carefree academic cultures?
- How do national and institutional cultures, policies and practices play out in the experiences of carers?

Context

- University spaces now accommodate a diverse population-including carers
- Number of employees with caring responsibilities is now significant (Carers UK, 2014)
- Persistence of the association between academic excellence and the figure of the White, middle-class, male and 'unencumbered' scholar (Maher & Tetreault, 2007)

Context

- Academic identities produced through a denial of emotions, domestic, physical and bodily matters (Ahmed, 1998; Braidotti, 1991; Leathwood & Hey, 2009)
- Ongoing physical and normative dissociation of academia and care, already ingrained in the Cartesian ideals
- Reactualised through the (gendered) discourses of the managerial university and of intensive parenting
- 'Greedy institutions' which command undivided loyalty and demand full availability (Coser, 1974; Hays, 1996)



Context

- Limited body of work on care/rs in academia
- Significant scholarship on academic parents (esp. mothers; David et al, 1993; Mason et al, 2013; Raddon, 2002)
- Growing scholarship on student parents (Brooks, 2012; Hook, 2016; Moreau, 2016)
- Dearth of research on other carers

Methodology and theory

- *Careers and carers: Career development and access to leadership positions among academic staff with caring responsibilities* (funded by LFHE; Moreau & Robertson, 2017)
- Also building on earlier work about students parents
- Three institutional case studies: policy analysis, interviews with academic carers and with 'policy' staff
- Exploratory approach - mobility as a key concern for participants

Methodology and theory

- Multi-level understanding of the production of inequalities/ identities (Crompton, 1999; Le Feuvre, 2002)
- ‘Care order’, ‘care regime’, ‘care practices’ (drawing on Connell, 1987; Matthews, 1984)
- Lynch’s (2016) multidimensional conceptualisation of inequality – notion of affective equality
- Focus on three related aspects emerging from the data: the in/visibilisation of care/rs, their mis/recognition and the im/possibility of more inclusive academic spaces

A close-up photograph of two hands clasped together in a supportive grip. The hands are light-skinned, and the background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting. The text is overlaid on the center of the image.

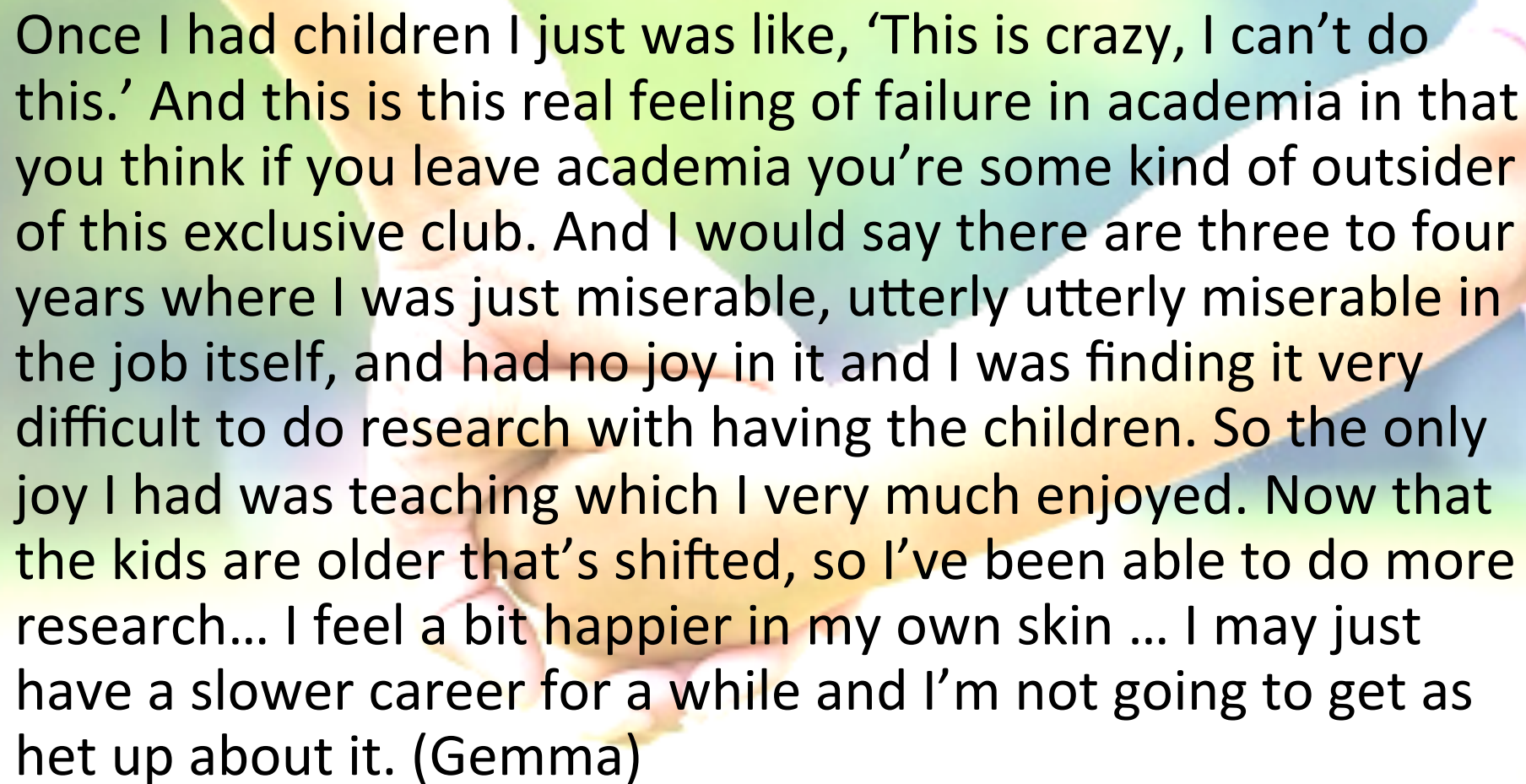
The in/visibilisation of relationships of care in academia

Carers and 'Carees': invisible others in academia?

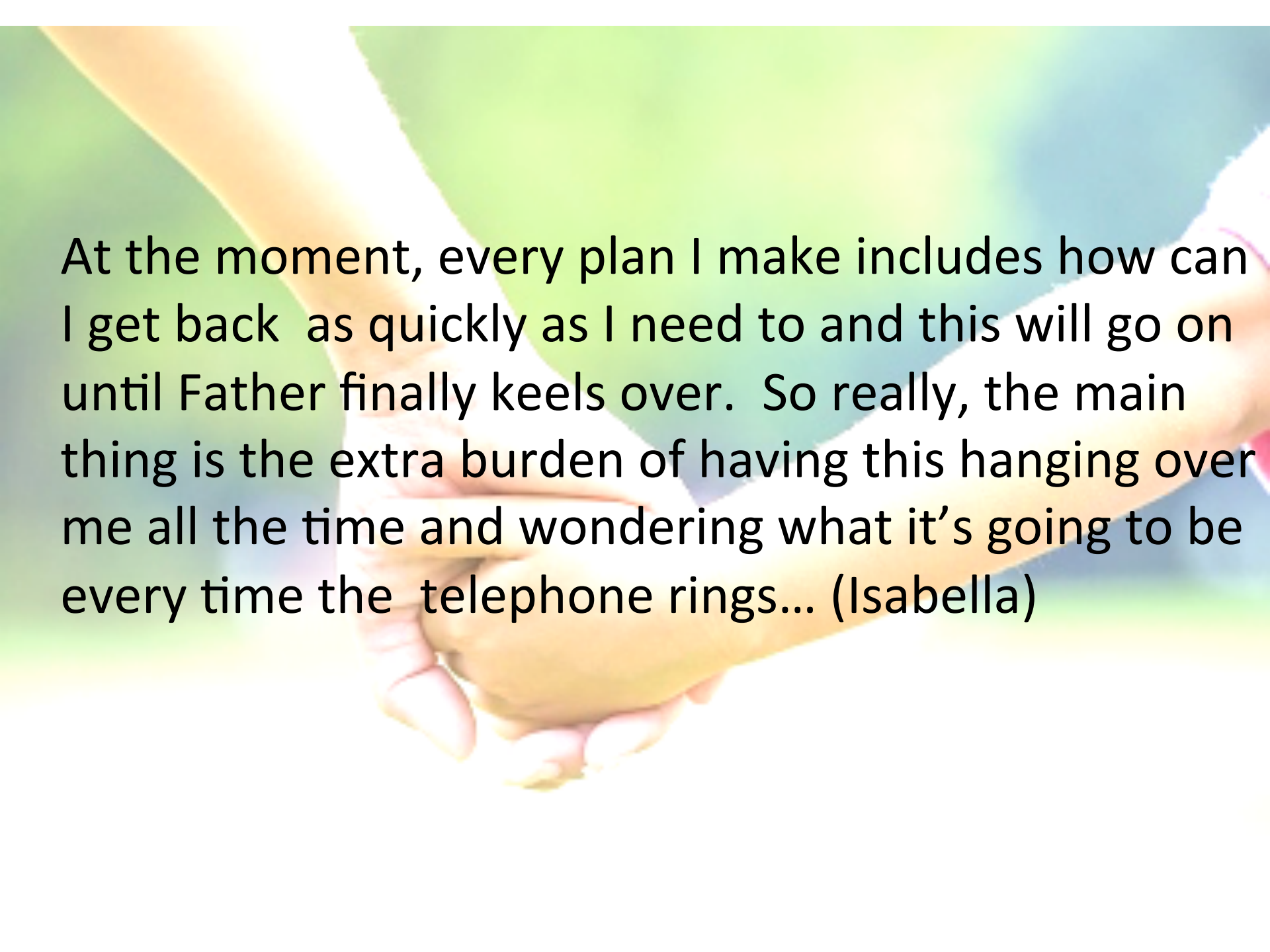
- Prevailing pattern of invisibility in academic, media, policy 'texts'
- National policy texts: at best passing-by reference; no requirement to collect data based on family/care circumstances; UCU and NUS work
- At institutional level: at best acknowledgment in 'specific' spaces; limited visibility and awareness of extant provision on campus
- 'Crisis' moments when carers/'carees' become hyper-visible (Spack, 1997)

A close-up photograph of two hands clasped together in a supportive grip. The hand on the left is larger and appears to be an adult's, while the hand on the right is smaller, likely a child's. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting. The text "The mis/recognition and othering of care/rs in academia" is overlaid in the center of the image.

The mis/recognition and othering of
care/rs in academia

A background image showing several hands of different skin tones gently holding a large, light-colored heart. The hands are positioned around the heart, with fingers and thumbs visible, creating a sense of care and support. The background is a soft, out-of-focus mix of green, yellow, and blue.

Once I had children I just was like, 'This is crazy, I can't do this.' And this is this real feeling of failure in academia in that you think if you leave academia you're some kind of outsider of this exclusive club. And I would say there are three to four years where I was just miserable, utterly utterly miserable in the job itself, and had no joy in it and I was finding it very difficult to do research with having the children. So the only joy I had was teaching which I very much enjoyed. Now that the kids are older that's shifted, so I've been able to do more research... I feel a bit happier in my own skin ... I may just have a slower career for a while and I'm not going to get as het up about it. (Gemma)



At the moment, every plan I make includes how can I get back as quickly as I need to and this will go on until Father finally keels over. So really, the main thing is the extra burden of having this hanging over me all the time and wondering what it's going to be every time the telephone rings... (Isabella)

Academic mobilities

- Polymorphous (long/short-term, inter/national)
- Expectations vary across subjects
- 'Mobility has become an important criterion for evaluating academic careers' (Kim, 2017: in press)
- Meeting the requirements of the global, mobile academic worker out of reach for some carers

Academic mobilities

That's certainly something I find harder to do now [that partner's health has declined], so I'm more choosy about the conferences that I go to and have to plan much more ahead of time how that's going to happen. So things like... going and having a visiting professor position or visiting staff member position somewhere else. I did it two years ago for six weeks, which was the maximum we thought it would be possible to do. At this stage in time I wouldn't do that again. So I think one of the restrictions is that aspect of academic life which is about being about and visiting different places. I think for a lot of people caring responsibilities that can be quite hard to manage. (Kat)

‘All carers are equal but some are more equal than others’?

- Greater level of support available for academics compared with students
- Those not fitting the archetype of the ‘bachelor boy’ were more likely to experience a sense of struggle and/or discrimination in care-free, masculinist and heteronormative HE
- Position-related in complex ways

I've found since I've moved into management I can't mention, I don't feel that I can talk about the challenges of child care. It's glossed over, it's just not mentioned, even though clearly it is an important aspect of what I do. (Jessica)

‘All carers are equal but some are more equal than others’?

- Greater visibility, recognition, protection and support of parental needs (also in relation to law and provision)
- ‘Other’ caring responsibilities, bereavement: invisibility, marginalisation and individualised solutions
- Care as an equity issue

A close-up photograph of two hands, one larger and one smaller, clasped together in a supportive grip. The hands are light-skinned. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting like a park or field. The text is centered over the hands.


The im/possibility of more inclusive
academic spaces

Towards inclusive care regimes and care practices

- ‘Universal’ or ‘careblind’, typified by a minimal policy intervention: policy approach to equality in which fairness equates sameness; but geared towards carefree scholars
- ‘Targeted’, with some specific provision made available for carers - brings visibility and support but risks reproducing a deficit view of carers as ‘special’ or ‘needy’

Care mainstreaming

- Transformative potential of 'mainstreaming', with all students/staff constructed as potential caregivers - Fraser's (1997) universal caregiver model;
- To be effective, needs to be well-resourced, deeply ingrained in institutional cultures; risks losing its transformative potential as it becomes implanted in neo-liberal, marketised agenda (Phipps, 2006), which support carers if economic imperatives are met
- Policies as rhizomatic rather than arborescent (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980)



Research report:

Moreau, M.P. & Robertson, M. (2017) *Carers and careers: Career development and access to leadership positions among academic staff with caring responsibilities*. London: Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.

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