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Version: Accepted Version

Article:
Hope, J., Lemanski, C., Bastia, T. et al. (2020) Childcare and academia : an intervention. International Development Planning Review, 42 (4). pp. 391-405. ISSN: 1474-6743

https://doi.org/10.3828/idpr.2019.40

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Childcare and academia – an intervention

This is the accepted version of the following article:

Hope, Jessica, Charlotte Lemanski, Tanja Bastia, Nina Isabella Moeller, Paula Meth & Glyn Williams (2019) Viewpoint: Childcare and academia: an intervention. International Development Planning Review. Online early. https://doi.org/10.3828/idpr.2019.40

which has been published in final form at
https://online.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/doi/abs/10.3828/idpr.2019.40

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Viewpoint

Childcare and academia: an intervention

Hope, Jessica, Charlotte Lemanski, Tanja Bastia, Nina Isabella Moeller, Paula Meth & Glyn Williams

International Development Planning Review, online early, (c) 2019 Liverpool University Press

Abstract: In this Viewpoint, we engage with the everyday politics of academia – specifically, how caring for young children continues to affect academic work and career trajectories in ways that could be better mitigated. This viewpoint piece collates the personal accounts of six development scholars who discuss their experiences of negotiating both academia and childcare, covering fieldwork, funding, career trajectories, sharing parental responsibilities and challenges for family life. Though charting different experiences, all these contributions argue for better recognition of both the gains and persistent inequalities in how care responsibilities impact academic work and careers and the need to better mitigate these with concrete changes to policy and practice.

Keywords: Care, Childcare, Pay gap, Gender inequality, Academia

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Childcare and Academia – an intervention

This viewpoint collates the personal accounts of six UK-based development scholars who discuss their experiences of negotiating both academia and childcare, covering fieldwork, funding, career trajectories, sharing parental responsibilities and challenges for family life. In doing so, we argue that caring for young children continues to affect academic work and career trajectories in ways that could be better mitigated. In a recent workshop about childcare and academia, it was apparent that we need examples and guidance within institutional structures, as well as more open discussion of how to combine family life and academia. Whilst this Viewpoint is focused on the contemporary challenges of being both a parent and academic, we recognise that this falls within wider discussions about other care commitments – to the elderly, the ill, or those with additional needs.

Early Career & Pregnant
Jessica Hope, University of Bristol

In this short contribution, I discuss my own experiences as a female, heterosexual, married early career development geographer with a (wonderful) two-year old daughter. This is written from the perspective of a political ecologist navigating academia with a small child and not as someone who has long researched dynamics of gender, work and care. Subsequently, my own experiences guide the policy debates and academic debates that are drawn from. I discuss my experiences of being an early career academic and pregnant, as well as my negotiations of travel once a parent.

The difficulties of having a baby in the early stages of your career is well-recognised, with many women planning pregnancy around the demands of their work. 'Post-tenure pregnancies' and births planned for the holidays are all strategies women use to try and minimize the negative impacts that having a baby can have on work-loads and career progression (Epifanio and Troeger 2013). Clearly, however, these strategies are not always possible nor desirable and suggest the continuing pressures and challenges of trying to secure both career and family. I became pregnant whilst on a short-term lecturing contract, which ran out half way through my maternity leave. My husband and I had moved cities (and into rented accommodation) for this job but moved back to the house we own in Manchester to have the baby. To prepare for having no income after 6 months, I did some temporary work upervising Masters students when my daughter was 4 months old. This involved student meetings once a month and marking dissertations over the Summer. Whilst breastfeeding on the sofa, I applied for an RGS Environment and Sustainability Grant and was successful. I also spent those first months applying for jobs. I enjoyed the thinking time but not the stress of imminent unemployment. I wrote an application for a Vice-Chancellor's Fellowship at the University of Bristol (which included news of my successful RGS grant). My husband and I travelled to Bristol for interviews when our baby was 5 months old and I got the job.

Although I spent some of my maternity leave applying for funding and jobs, I did not write any papers during my maternity and, in terms of my CV, I am missing a year of academic outputs. It may be that no-one is expected to write papers when on maternity leave. However, once maternity leave is over you return to a career much judged on publications. I have since been asked why I have fewer than expected publications, even by those who know I have been on maternity leave and I have felt behind at points. Since 2015, mothers have been able to transfer their maternity leave to the other parent (sharing time spent with the child as much as away from work). However, to date the policy has had a limited impact in terms of take-up figures (Allen 2018). Standards of maternity provision have also been found to be significant in tempering the negative effects that maternity leave has on academic careers (Epifanio and Troeger 2013). More generous (and responsive) maternity packages allow mothers to take enough time off from non-research related duties such as teaching and administrative tasks and stay in touch with their research. This in turn helps lessen the gap in their research once they return from maternity leave (Epifanio and Troeger 2013). In recognition of the difficulties of negotiating maternity leave as a career gap, the University

of Bristol (where I am now based) offer a coaching service for those about to go on maternity leave and offer a research term on your return.

Whilst the collective experiences of male academics who have children has been found to have no direct impact their career progression (Epifanio and Troeger 2013), there are still negative effects for women. For example, many women who have been successful in securing a post-doc receive maternity pay but cannot return to complete their project, as their funding is used to cover their maternity package. Assuming the pregnancy fell at the end of the post doc, this means losing the opportunity to develop a book proposal or funding bid. At any point of the postdoc, it means women lose crucial time to think, write and publish, during a period that is itself crucial to consolidating academic contributions and careers. Those in fixed-term contracts are worse off as they often receive no maternity support and no support back into academia following the birth of their child. These inequalities help explain the ongoing gender inequalities within academia, which remain significant and sobering. In UK Higher Education Geography, for example, in 1978, 4 percent of UK Geography Professors were female; by 2013 the figure was 21 percent (Maddrell et al 2016:50). These figures do not reflect postgraduate gender ratios or those of early-career academics, where women outnumber men at the early career contract levels of research assistant, teaching assistant and early career lecturers/researchers - making clear that this is an issue of retention and promotion. There is a very clear and continuous decline in the proportion of women as seniority increases. In UK geography, men outnumber women in full-time positions by a ratio f 2:1, with more women at the lower ranks. Women make up 44 per cent of full time staff under the age of 35, but only 16 per cent of Professors (Boyle and Garinder 2013). This stark imbalance, when coupled with the large monetary gender pay gap among professors (£5,116 per year), is a primary driver of the overall gender pay gap for academics working the UK (UCU 2016).There is thus a clear rationale for addressing the ways that these inequalities persist, despite long-running initiatives to ensure gender equality.

Following my successful application for an RGS Environment and Sustainability Grant, my husband left his job early to come with me to Bolivia during my maternity leave. For our personal lives, this was a wonderful two months and my daughter enjoyed Bolivia and returned a more sociable baby. In terms of my work, it was productive and I collected data that has been the basis of the work I have done during the first year of my fellowship. Financially, it was difficult as my husband took a career break to accompany us and we covered the costs of his trip to Bolivia. Since this experience, I have become more aware of the financial costs of going on fieldwork with a child, as well as more aware of how different people negotiate this. Whilst some people are clear in asking funders to cover the costs of childcare in the field, others (as I was during my maternity leave) are unsure about what is possible. For my current fieldtrip (I started writing this from Bolivia), I requested that some of my research funding be used to cover the costs of my sister coming to Bolivia with me to help with childcare in a setting with limited English-speaking childcare infrastructure - and Bristol agreed. When I go to Canada in the autumn, I will use my research funding to pay for a nursery. However, this is subtracted from my allocated research budget. Whilst some funders recognise and cover the financial costs of childcare for fieldwork, it is not confirmed as explicit policy and has no separate budget. For this reason, I am working with the Developing Areas Research group (DARG) and the Gender and Feminist Geographies Research Group (GFGRG) at the Royal Geographical Society to develop best practice guidelines for funders.

Conferences are also a vital part of being an academic in terms of networking and sharing work. However, like fieldwork, they often involve travel. During my first year back at work I took my daughter to Barcelona for a conference and to Oslo for another. Both were important for my work and felt especially important to attend, following a year away on maternity leave. In Barcelona, there was a wonderful crèche, which meant I could attend panels and concentrate on work whilst there. The crèche was on site, which took away some of the anxiety of leaving my daughter because I knew I could be back with her instantly. Although she was too small to be in the crèche all day, I did attend key panels each day and got a lot from the conference. In Oslo, despite attending a wonderful conference, there was no crèche. Instead, myself and a colleague from the US arranged a private nanny in the flat rented by her and her husband. This was a 15 minute walk (10 minute panicked run) away from the conference. Sadly, it did not work out well. The nanny did

not come with the toys and space of Barcelona's crèche and my daughter was hemmed into a small, strange space. The nanny was inexperienced and could not cope with two toddlers. On day two, she texted me that my daughter was 'very sad'. I rushed back immediately and spent most of the conference with my daughter or worrying about her. Whilst I did see lots of people, I did not get much from the academic content of the conference and missed out.

In part, maternity leave, fieldwork and conferences need to better accommodate parents so that parents are not forced to make tough decisions that pitch career against parenting – taking a shorter maternity leave than they would like; leaving a child to cope with conference child care, rather than thrive in it; or leaving a child at home when you would rather all stay together. When well supported, I have found fieldwork and conferences to be a really positive opportunity and experience for my daughter. I have loved taking her to Bolivia and, as I have been well-supported and well-informed, it has provided an amazing opportunity for her to travel, see new places, meet new people and try new things. I have watched her become more confident on this trip and have relished the time with her. When she is older I may well leave her at home but whilst she is very young, taking her with me has been a wonderful way to be both parent and researcher.

I have had the confidence to take my daughter to Bolivia because I knew of two colleagues who had taken their children on fieldwork. One, a Professor, had taken all three children to her fieldsites when they were babies. Another, a lecturer, had taken her two kids together on numerous fieldtrips. These women are both wonderful parents and successful academics and they gave me the confidence to try to be similar.

Personal reflections of parenting and fieldwork
Charlotte Lemanski, University of Cambridge

In this short contribution I reflect on the ways in which I have combined nearly a decade of parenting with international travel for fieldwork and conferences, and use these personal experiences to propose interventions that could improve working conditions for academic parents.

My research is primarily situated in South Africa, and prior to parenthood I regularly spent 3- 4 months per year in South Africa alongside the teaching/administration responsibilities of my UK academic posts (initially at UCL, and now at Cambridge). Since becoming a parent in 2010, and again in 2012, the location and demands of my research, teaching and administration roles have not altered, but my capacity to spend long periods overseas has shifted significantly. While for short trips I usually leave both children at home with my husband, for longer fieldwork periods I have taken both chidlren with me to South Africa. When my eldest was 18 months, my mother-in-law joined me for six weeks of fieldwork as nanny; when my youngest was three years old we spent two months in Cape Town, using a local nursery while my older child (by then at school in the UK) stayed at home with my husband; and most recently, my family have just accompanied me on an eight-month fieldtrip during which time my children (aged 6 and 9) attended school in Cape Town and my husband took unpaid leave. The decision to take my children with me on fieldwork has been both fantastic and fragmentary for our family; fantastic in offering new opportunities for the children to see a world beyond their 'norm' and in allowing me to combine parenting with fieldwork, but also fragmentary as most trips require some form of family separation and/or financial deficit.

For all of the fieldtrips in which my family has accompanied me, the funding body for that specific research has agreed to cover their costs (travel, childcare/school fees, visas and living costs). While I am very grateful for funders willing to meet the costs associated with academic parents undertaking overseas fieldwork, in no case has a funder explicitly included the costs of accompanying dependents on the list of 'fundable items'. Indeed, whenever I have approached funders directly asking for their policy on accompanied fieldwork I have been met with silence, albeit followed by a willingness to cover these costs within existing budgets. Whilst laudable that these funders (in my case the British Academy, Leverhulme Trust, and Isaac Newton Fund) are willing to support accompanied fieldwork, I wonder how many others in my position have been

deterred from applying for grants due to the absence of transparency on what funding could cover. Consequently, I propose that funding bodies include the costs of accompanied fieldwork in their listed fundable items, and that these costs are allocated a separate budget so that academic parents are not effectively offered smaller research budgets.

Looking beyond disciplines that require overseas fieldwork, all academic jobs potentially involve travel for conferences and collaborations as well as evening seminars – all of which typically function outside the hours/location of an academic's usual childcare. For conferences, the obvious solution is the provision of on-site childcare. As an example of best practice, the Royal Geographical Society's Annual Conference already provides this 'free' service (the costs are covered by the conference fees of all conference participants), which has offered outstanding provision for both my children. In addition, there needs to be financial support for the additional costs of bringing children to conferences (travel, accommodation), which could potentially be offered by conference committees and/or home institutions. However, for other forms of work that occur outside of 'core hours' (i.e. the hours in which childcare is generally available) and/or away from 'home' (i.e. where childcare is already booked) it is harder to mitigate the impacts on academic parents. Of particular concern is the widespread culture within academia that if you are passionate about your research and interested in promotion you will regularly engage in work outside core hours/home location. This sends a message that the academic environment is superior to the home/family environment, and that the career ladder is only open to those willing to prioritise the former. While changing this culture can start at the personal scale – for example, limiting attendance at evening seminars and not working in evenings/weekends, both of which are key strategies for promoting mental health as well as setting an example for junior colleagues and students – institutional cultural change is also necessary (and emerging via Athena-Swan interventions). At present academia implicitly requires a choice in prioritising career or family. This needs radical change to recognise that all academics have demands and identities within and beyond academia. Some of these changes could provide support to enable scholars to combine their identities (e.g. funding for accompanied fieldwork, conference childcare), while others are required to encourage greater separation of these identities (e.g. to value time spent engaged in non-academic activities, limit expectations on staff travel).

Combing parenting, academic work, and long-term ethnographic research in South America
Tanja Bastia, University of Manchester

I have two children: a 22 year old son and a 2 year old daughter (both wonderful) and I work at the cross-section of feminist geography and international development. Most of my research is based on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork, primarily in Bolivia, but also Argentina and Spain.

My son was born when my husband and I were undergraduate students. Neither of our parents or other relatives lived close by and my travel commitments increased significantly when I started my PhD a few years later. My PhD involved multi-sited fieldwork in Cochabamba, Bolivia and Buenos Aires, Argentina but the funding also required working as a research assistant on a project that involved quarterly visits to Bolivia. I also worked as a consultant for the International Labour Organisation in Geneva to make ends meet. Unsurprisingly, it took me five years to complete my PhD but during the first interview I had for an academic post I was still asked why it took me so long to finish.

We used a number of strategies to manage childcare and the various research trips. My mum helped with childcare during her holidays when she travelled to the UK. Sometimes our son would spend a few weeks in Italy, while I travelled for research. For the first substantive spell of fieldwork in Bolivia, while he was in reception class, I took him with me. We lived in a peri-urban neighbourhood with a friend and participated in daily activities while carrying out interviews. Having my son along seemed the most natural option, to my interviewees and myself. Interruptions were acceptable. People used to ask many more questions when I travelled on my own than when he came with me. The year after I had to go to Buenos Aires but safety was an issue in the informal settlements where I was living and doing interviews so I went on my own and left him with his dad

for two months. Our strategy for most of his primary school years was to live close to where my husband worked so that he would look after our son while I was away at conferences or fieldwork, as his work does not include extensive travel. Our seldom travelled to conferences with me, except for the RGS IBG, which provides an excellent ‘free’ crèche.

Twenty years on, we had another child and our lives are significantly different. We have our own home and we both have permanent jobs in academia. We had always wanted to have more children but did not feel this was possible due to travelling and temporary contracts. We felt we could start trying to have another one when I got through probation, but by then I was in my mid-thirties and the first couple of times I became pregnant I miscarried. Then I did not get pregnant for five years. This was a very long time, when I felt I had to continue working and acting ‘as usual’, travelling to conferences and for fieldwork, while feeling physically exhausted and mentally depressed. My main strategy for getting better involved limiting travel. This is a bit of a paradox, given how central travel is to our professional lives, but this decision also came with a silver lining (see below).

When I was pregnant I also found out that I was successful in gaining a Leverhulme research fellowship. Unlike my PhD, where I lived in a community, the methodology for the current project involves research in two regions that I am not very familiar with, and interviews in rural, peri-urban and urban areas, and a lot of daily travel, something I could not combine with solo parenting. The other two options – leaving my daughter for an extended period of time or having my mother help out – are also out of the question: the former because we now live closer to my work and my husband’s commute would make solo parenting for him very difficult, and the latter because my mother is looking after her 93 year old mother full-time. So the interviews are being carried out by two research assistants.

The University of Manchester, unlike some other institutions, does not offer a research semester upon return from maternity leave but my sabbatical leave happened to fall around the birth of my daughter. This smoothed my return to work. However, even then, juggling childcare and work felt overwhelming so I had a period of one year of working part-time. Contrary to what most people told me, that working part-time involved just halving the wage for the same amount of work, working part-time gave me a greater sense of balance between my working and personal lives. I also felt more entitled to say no to some requests. I am aware of the well-known long-term negative financial consequences related to lower pay and lower future pensions (People’sPension, 2019), but this choice was not solely about being better able to care for my daughter but also about prioritising my own well-being. Clearly I am able to do this because I have a permanent position, supportive line-managers and am able to draw on twenty years of research to continue carrying out research from afar. I also have plenty of data, interviews, and ‘unfinished projects’ that could keep me busy strapped to my desk for at least another couple of years. By limiting travel, for both personal and environmental reasons, I have been able to focus on finalising two large writing projects: a monograph that combines my PhD and my post-doc research and a large edited Handbook. However, as others in this contribution have mentioned, there is a dire need to move away from using the excuse that we do our jobs because we love what we do, to justify an outrageous (often self-)exploitation. This journey has definitely taught me to be more focused on my priorities; be able to say ‘no’ to some things; value my personal life by putting limits on my work-time and work-related responsibilities; and the value of practicing a slower scholarship (Mountz et al., 2015; Mullings, Peake, & Parizeau, 2016).

Children on fieldwork and everywhere
Nina Moeller, University of Coventry

Academia or not, bringing up children is a struggle, especially in a world of wage labour and in the absence of extended family, a populated village green or any other distributed system of care. As is common to all struggles, it is made worse when combined with other forms of hardship or strife. Given the farcical levels of pressure and competition in an institutional setting overcrowded by overproduced postdocs, and the ultimately rather precarious privileges of a university contract (if

you can get one at all), it seems hardly possible to juggle a career with the well-being of your children, your mental health, as well as loving relationships with a partner, friends and co-workers.

Academia as a workplace culture favours single, single-minded careerists with chainsaws on their elbows. Becoming/being a parent, or any other kind of carer for that matter, is likely to confront us more acutely with the aspects of academia that ignore, devalue and undermine the efforts of carerhood, and relegate its joys and pains to the background of significance. This is in and of itself not necessarily only a bad thing: the experience might make us into agents of change, spanners in the cold machinery of competitive knowledge production. Or at least, I think it should.

When I first got pregnant, I was just finishing my PhD. The surprise, joy and terror which the positive pregnancy test precipitated certainly helped me submit first my thesis and then its corrections on time, scrambling desperately to face birth without a workload hanging over my head. I remember thinking 'it's a man's world' when I sat there, huge seven months round, at my viva in front of an all male panel (the gender composition being partially my own fault, which just made the point more acute). Men, too, of course, lose out in denial and devalorisation of reproduction: the growing and birthing of babies, the feeding, watering and keeping healthy of bodies of all ages, the facilitation of repose, the smiling, the letting cry, weaving sanity and resilience, enabling joy and a life worth living. What would human life be without these prime practices?

Our time of early parenthood, sleepless, messy and confused as it already was, was punctuated, as it is for so many, by panic and despair about the future and our means of provisioning. My partner and I were lucky enough (and privileged with family support) to make it out of the academy and into a multitude of smaller income generating activities which we muddled through (sometimes more, sometimes less successfully) with a toddler, then pre-schooler.

At some point, I reached out for a way to return to my research interests and received an Independent Scholar Fellowship from the Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF). This funder explicitly listed 'reasonable childcare costs' as a possible budget item. This was encouraging rather than actually helpful, as no manner of creative accounting would change the bottom line: budgeting for childcare would effectively lower the research budget available. However, small acts of recognition may be first steps to wider change, and the ISRF walk their talk and have been accommodating of my personal circumstances at every turn. Some funders (including my current one, the European Commission) have schemes which enable a return to academia after a 'career break'. Helpful as they are, they bespeak (through positive discrimination) a work culture which does not value life experience and knowledge acquisition outside its own rather dusty confines. They step in as rescue measures, like minority quotas in a racist society: the fact that we need them is sick in itself.

My second child was six months old when we embarked, as a family of four, on our first collective fieldwork trip to the Ecuadorian Amazon. We stayed for six long months battling erupting teeth, biting insects and unusual skin diseases, but were received and entertained with exuberant warmth by the people whose life circumstances we sought to understand. My work in the Amazon was in many ways facilitated by my children, and my being with my children facilitated by my work in the Amazon. 'Sharing' my family certainly made me a more comprehensible, trustworthy human being in the eyes of my interlocutors. At the same time, ethnographic fieldwork in indigenous and peasant communities makes it easy to have one's children participate in the workplace – imagine bringing a toddler to a seminar on campus. We have returned for more fieldwork since, and so far each trip has been a worthwhile adventure.

All of this, of course, is made possible only because my partner has sacrificed his chances of a career beyond dishwashing by acting both as primary child carer, cook and cleaner, as well as unofficial research assistant and editor. We also had to opt for a school that would allow us to be absent for several months at a time: i.e. a school that we have to pay for, reducing disposable income to zero. I am not complaining: this was our choice, and so far it has bestowed us with bumpy, but life-enriching experiences.

However, the violence of academia (which it shares with so much of contemporary society) lies in its neglect and indeed scorn of care and reproductive activities, which we need to counter by way of something a little farther-reaching than childcare items in our research budgets. We need a more radical discourse of necessary change, in the university and beyond, to begin wider conversations on what in heaven's name we are doing to ourselves, to our children and to our habitat in our everyday reality.

Sharing Parenting as an Academic Couple
Paula Meth & Glyn Williams, University of Sheffield

Paula's Story
Our first child (now 16) was unplanned and occurred at a time when Glyn was working in London and had recently moved in with me in Sheffield, where I was working and living. We both had permanent jobs, a position we now recognise as a great privilege, Glyn was at Kings and I was at Sheffield Hallam. I had recently completed a rare 2 month funded fieldwork trip to South Africa (my home country) looking at gender violence and informality. Because of the pregnancy, the unexpected changes to my life, morning sickness & a significant teaching load my subsequent use of this excellent data (in publications and dissemination) was frustratingly limited, especially given it was my final stint of extended fieldwork. I changed jobs when our daughter was 9 months old, moving to Sheffield University and into a department with very few women, very few colleagues working internationally and where no woman had ever taken maternity leave before. It was a permanent post, but into a slightly different discipline necessitating a steep learning curve.

During the first 3 years of our daughter's life, Glyn's commute to London continued, and I struggled to remain sane and productive in Sheffield. I was resentful, I worked full time, a choice I now question. However, I had no close friends in a similar position to learn from and I worried about my career progression and also being paid less for doing the same – I wasn't convinced part time work would be well managed. These days I talk openly with our daughter about the tensions this time produced for us all, but especially my relationship with her. I have significant regrets about rushing her into and out of nursery on a full time basis, although she was very happy there. Work trips to South Africa were frustratingly limited to a week's travel, with most of my research occurring through the work of remotely located wonderful research assistants, particularly Sibongile Buthelezi in Durban. Our second child was born three years later following a miscarriage in between. My unyielding commitment to my job (but not my own research career) during these 3 years later left me feeling foolish and unsupported. I ran an open day while miscarrying! Sheffield did provide those returning from maternity leave with funding to support teaching and admin buy-out for a semester, but for complex reasons this got squeezed by my Department, and I didn't receive the full benefit of this in practice. When our son was very young Glyn won a substantial DFID-ESRC grant, instead of being pleased for him, I cried, knowing this meant 3 years of him travelling to India frequently. My research visits to SA were very limited during this time, we juggled travel between our opposing destinations. I persisted with small projects in South Africa, including while my son was breastfeeding, leaving freezer drawers full of expressed milk for him in my absence. Those years at work were dire, I was barely keeping my head above water. A failed promotion application on the basis of an 'interrupted trajectory' and the narrow focus of my department meant I felt very isolated. A request to go part-time was discouraged by my Head of Department, as he feared the impact of the 2008 financial crisis would mean the University would not be able to guarantee a return to a 100% contract. Yet at the same time our work-home balance was significantly improved and living in the north meant home ownership and quality of life was easily in reach. Glyn had given up his wonderful job at Kings to work in Sheffield (joining my department) shortly after our son was born, ending nearly 4 years of commuting. I was overjoyed by this, single parenting was never my strong point and we work much better as an equal team. We navigated around working in the same department, a situation we are still in today.

A hijacking in SA on an earlier research trip and my choice to focus on gender and violence heightened my own anxiety about fieldwork, and although we've taken our children there on holidays (sometimes linked to conferences), I have persistently chosen to separate this from

fieldwork: likewise we've not been to India with Glyn when he has travelled there for work. This decision is shaped by our mutual full time positions in work – we have never had aligning sabbaticals & have never felt able to 'take time out' of our jobs to travel with each other. More recently, and in discussion with our kids, we've prioritised their stability and schooling as they've moved into high school. As such fieldwork has remained necessarily brief but also a sanctuary away from home and the kids. We've benefitted from the presence of extended families in relative proximity, who in the earlier years in particular, really stepped up to support us. I've recently completed a 3 year ESRC grant which has involved a lot of (short duration) travel to SA and some to Ethiopia. Our children grumble about our absence, but also quite enjoy it, they like the small gifts, photos and stories. They like that they are the best in their classes in Geography. Short trips are relatively easy now, although I know I've burdened Glyn over the past 3 years. My sense of our juggling and relatively equitable sharing of responsibilities over the years is that we've both held our careers back a bit. Neither of us is a superstar, but both of us are in strong, now rewarding, positions in a department that is wholly transformed and progressive. We can almost see the light at the end of the tunnel, our time as a couple undertaking fieldwork jointly for longer periods of time is tantalisingly close…

Glyn's Story...
Looking back over our joint history, I'm struck by how the pressures and rewards of parenting are experienced unevenly within an academic couple, despite similar starting points within the same career, and sincere commitments to sharing domestic responsibilities.

Early on, the biological differences of pregnancy, births and breastfeeding definitely won out over our attempts to achieve equality, and were compounded by my weekly commutes to Kings. I worked long days in London to free up time in Sheffield: Friday afternoons spent with our daughter were special, and gave Paula much-needed time in the office. However, I was perpetually playing catch-up with a toddler's rapidly-changing routines, as well as feeling incredible guilt at the burden I was dumping on my partner (big thanks to Margo Huxley for support she offered Paula at this time). When the opportunity to move to Sheffield came, I took it without question, even though it meant a shift away from Geography and into a Planning Department where international work was then a relative rarity.

When our daughter was born, I was lucky to be at a point where I had extended periods of fieldwork to write about, but parenthood definitely changed my relationship with India for over a decade. When I gained the research grant Paula mentioned, my trips were time-bound and far more 'managerial': it seemed like every moment away from the kids had to be productive in order to be justified, and there was no time to simply absorb the exp erience of being there. It's only over the last five years that I've felt able to participate in research again first-hand, and I'm grateful to all of my Indian co-researchers for the direct re-connection that this has given me with 'the field'. Many of these people (Darshini, Karen, Binitha, Devika) are working in an academic environment far more patriarchal than that of the UK, and it's been my good fortune that they've understood and respected the compromises around research I've had to make.

Fast-forwarding to the present, as Paula has zipped off on various international trips this year, I've taken on the role of temporary single parent happily. This isn't such a sacrifice anymore: after all, taking time out to watch Killing Eve with our teenagers is a whole lot more fun than juggling a career, nappies and broken nights' sleep. The gendered sting in the tail, however, comes in the form of the middle-age career 'plateau'. Despite public commitments to rethink this, universities seem to have deeply ingrained in their institutional culture the unrealistic reference point of a hypothetical burden-free individual who expresses their dynamism and leadership through hitting the latest set of performance targets (income gained, 4* outputs, etc., etc.). I can't help feeling that if caring responsibilities mean I'm not fully living up to this role model (and participating in all of the informal out-of-hours networking that sustain it) as a man, this is either not understood or is implicitly seen as my choice – as if other choices were available, or that responsibility could be magically offloaded elsewhere.

So, what is to be done? Paula and I were lucky enough to enter academia in the 1990s, when job security was greater, and the pressures of a target-driven culture just beginning to bite. As our generation moves into senior management roles, it's incumbent upon us all to recognise that social reproduction – be that parenting and other caring roles, or simply looking out for the well-being of our students and colleagues – is hard work, and that its distribution remains highly political. Parenting has many of its own rewards, of course, and not least of these is the empathy it allows us to build with others who undertake reproductive labour. This has to guide us in the decisions we take, both personally and professionally.

Conclusion
Jessica Hope

Though charting different experiences, all these contributions raise the need for change – to the culture of academic workplaces and to policy and practice. In terms of cultural change, we need more openness about, and validation of, care responsibilities, and the opportunity to work within institutions that value family life. Specifically, we need more responsive policies and practices that recognise academics' caring responsibilities, to ensure intellectual contribution and wellbeing. We need more recognition for those times in a child's life that necessitate career gaps or flexible working practices (for all genders and types of family), without these significantly damaging career prospects. A starting point for this article has been a somewhat narrow focus on fieldwork and travel but this has opened up some space to include the much more complicated and difficult realities that (many) colleagues face when trying to have families or otherwise respond to the needs of their loved ones. We need a better work culture that supports colleagues through this and prevents their isolation and/or limits career progression.

In terms of changes to policy and practice, these contributions suggest tangible changes that would lessen the challenges that academia poses to family life (and vice versa). Senior Management, for example, can take a lead on enabling the cultural changes set out above and make sure that departmental policies - for hiring, parental leave, travel and fieldtrips – are flexible for, and responsive to, care responsibilities. Universities and funders need to be explicit about funding childcare costs (from a separate pot), for example, and be clear in their guidelines that fieldwork and travel demands are possible for those with care responsibilities and are not a barrier to career promotion. Having a family or other kinds of care commitments should not carry significant costs for your working life and career.

A final important point is about gender. For all the gains made over a short number of years, academia remains strikingly unequal. Conscious and unconscious bias explain continuing inequalities for race and gender. However, there are also a multitude of supporting policies and practices that help maintain the status quo, despite willingness to address inequality. Whilst it has been illuminating for me, as a young, female scholar, to realise and recognise that men share many of the challenges that having children pose for academic work, it is also clear that having a family still involves far greater career costs for women. We must recognise both the gains and persistent inequalities in how care responsibilities impact academic work and careers and better mitigate these with concrete changes to policy and practice.

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