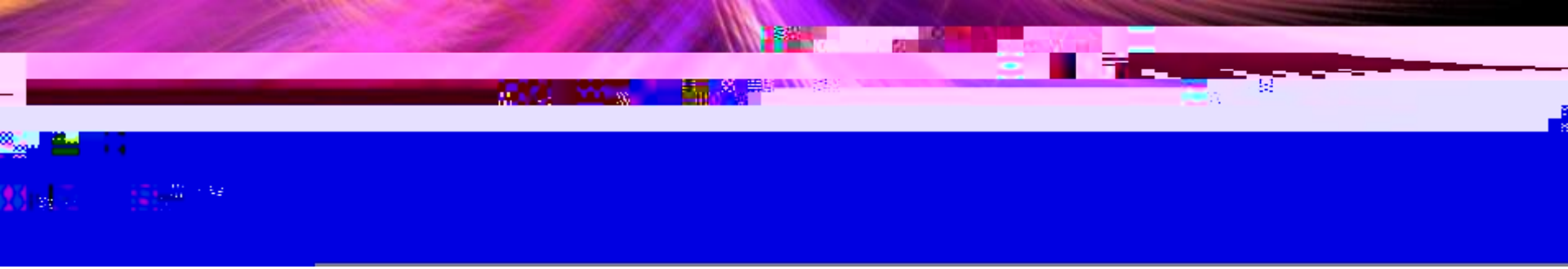


Project Background

- Lack of (critical, sociological) research on conferences (Henderson, 2015), despite billion-dollar value of industry (Rowe, doctoral work)
- Emphasis on longer term mobility in studies on academic mobility, studies of work-based travel focus on regular travel
- Discursive contradiction: 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 , 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?

Photo: 'Two Sets of Stuff' by Emily Henderson

Theoretical underpinnings 2: Time and academia - common discourses of ‘speeding up’

- ‘Individuals...must make decisions quickly in a world which is fast moving and constantly changing

1 – External time, passive subject

- ‘Clock time’

3 – Time/subjectivity

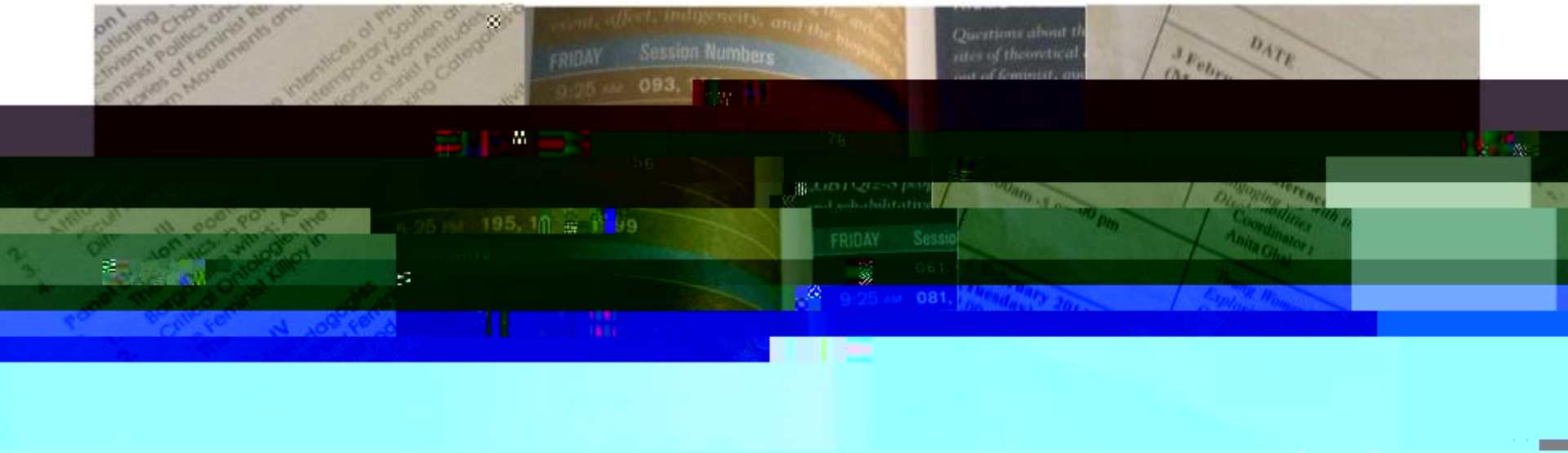
- ‘Time and subjectivity are inextricably produced in and through each other’ (Henderson, 2018)
- ‘Event time’ – ‘time and phenomena are entirely entangled’ (Adkins, 2009, §4.1)
- Lapping (2016) – is temporality inherent to the possibility of the subject (and vice versa)32<32<nB<n7r52e)

Time/subjectivity in relation to caring

1 – External time, passive subject
The schedule as an imperative to attend around a particular timetable

2 – External time, active subject
The schedule as a challenge to overcome – how to obtain maximum benefit from the conference whilst not compromising on care

3 – Time/subjectivity
The disjuncture between the passive and active relationship (with time perceived as external) is a state of ongoing carer-academic subject formation



Research design

Stage 1: Pre-conference

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

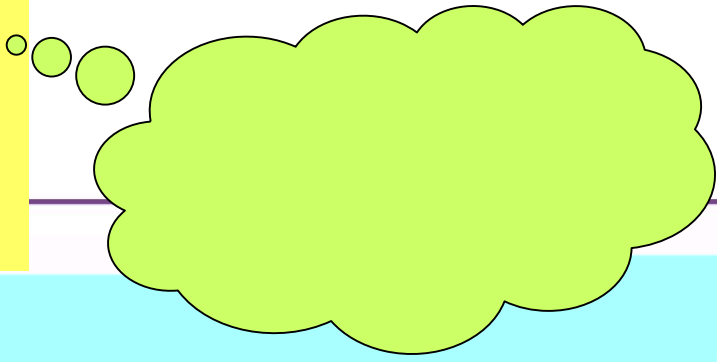
Stage 2: Conference

- 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

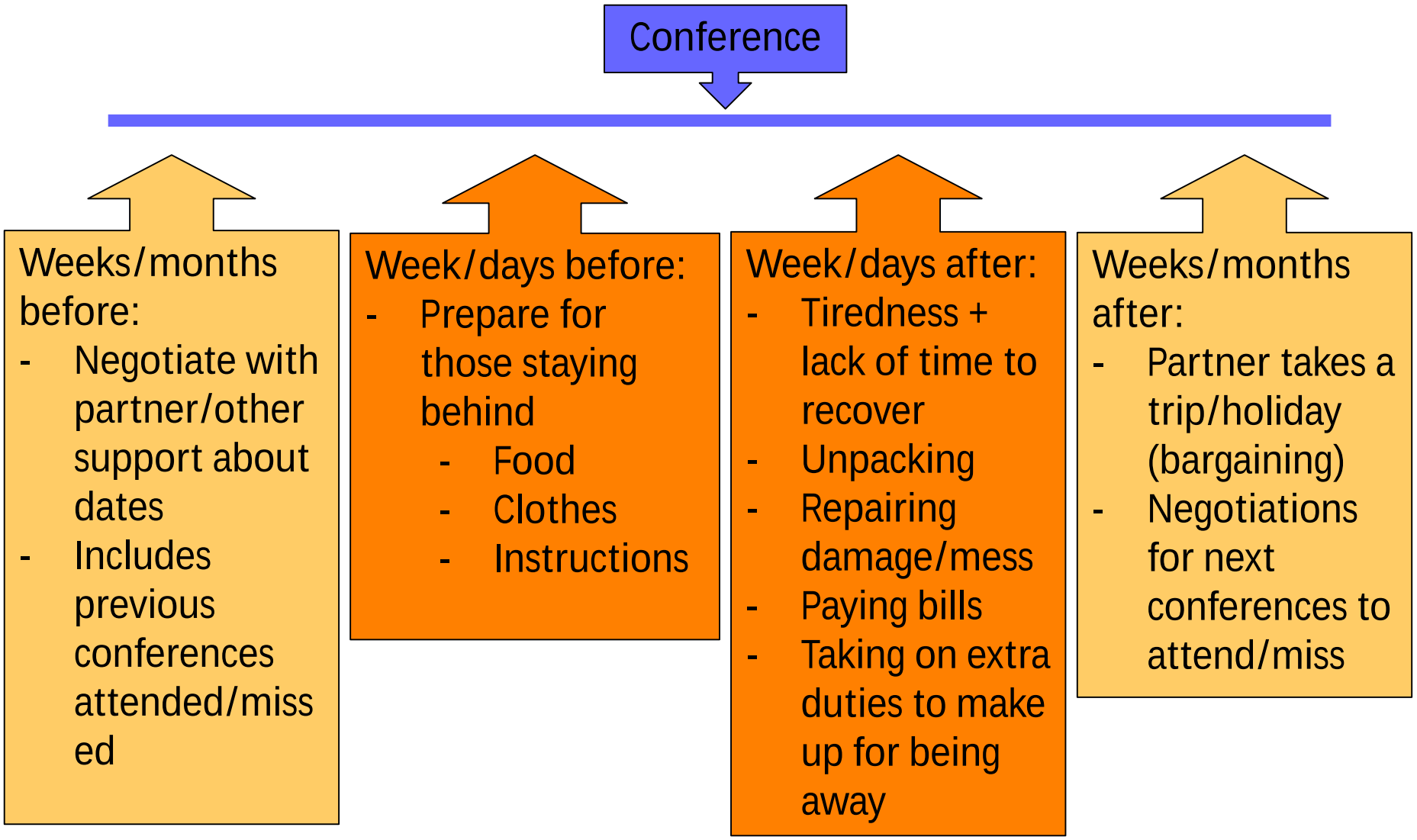
(Sullivan & Gershuny, 2017; Wigley, 2017)

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



More than Just a Few Days



Care

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 is 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)

Time: Balancing conferences & care

Conference ‘clock time’

Beginning of the day

Sessions

Breaks

Transition times

Social times

End of the day

Care activities

The ‘check-up’
P35 – 5 text messages exchanged in mid-morning break ‘to check everything

Time: Winning and losing against time

Conference ‘clock time’

Beginning of the day

Sessions

Breaks

Transition times

Social times

End of the day

Care activities

- Technical hitch in session used to check phone: WIN!
- Session presented in another language used to buy birthday present: WIN!
- Share the conference by social media with family back home: WIN!

- Conference spent checking Facebook about elderly relative: LOSE!

‘In Two Places at Once’ – the role of technology

- Mobile technology as a means of maintaining contact – ‘absent presence’ (Willis et al., 2017)
- Mobile technology in relation to the time/subjectivity theorisation:
  - A means of ‘outsmarting’ the of a conference.
- Managing the care routine from a distance
  - Care routine continuing in participants’ minds while at conference
  - Checking pick-up had happened
  - Checking nursery app to see if lunch eaten

  -> anxiety when confirmation of care routine not confirmed, also comfort in contact with home
- Managing the unexpected
  - Sorting out child’s disaster haircut
  - Petsitter leaving early

  -> knowledge of the potential for the unexpected to happen can lead to constant vigilance of communication devices

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)

11 phone calls to partner. I was trying to check they were alright – they had had a difficult afternoon – and I was worried that I could not get hold of them (they had fallen asleep out of earshot of the phone) (P10)

‘In Two Places at Once’ – phone checking

Answer 1:
Phone as a physical object

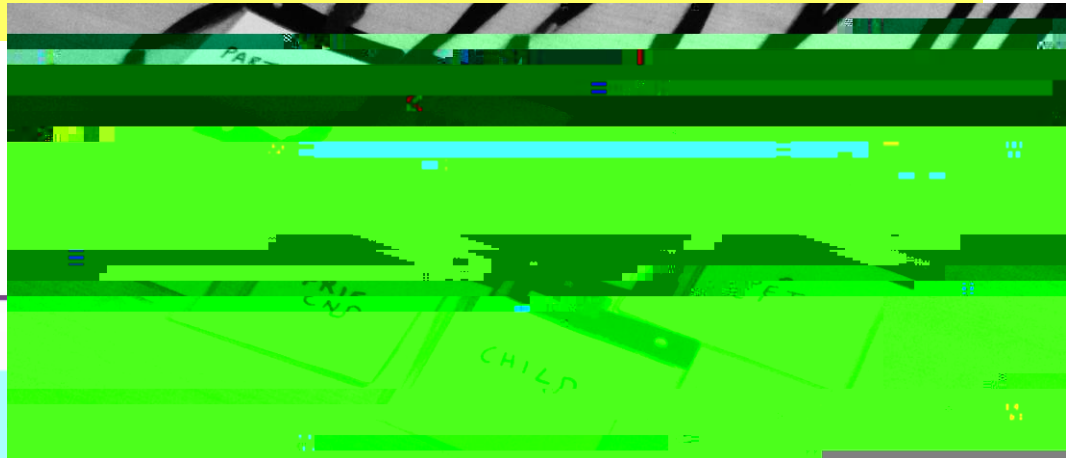
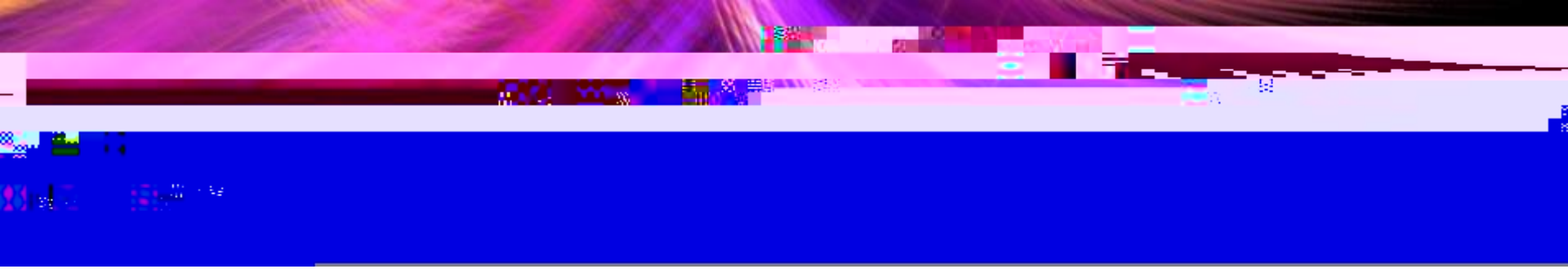
- Keep in bag and check in breaks
- Keep on table but face down
- Keep on table, face up, on silent
- Keep in lap
- Observe others’ level of phone use and emulate
- Breaks/social time seen as non-conference time

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)

Time/subjectivity in relation to caring responsibilities and conferences

3 – Time/subjectivity
The disjuncture between the passive and active relationship (with time perceived as external) is a state of ongoing carer-academic subject formation.

- Superhuman academic time manager
- Vulnerability to clock time
- Ambivalence/ resignation

Next steps

- Preparing two sets of briefing notes/recommendations for HEIs and conference organisers.
- Preparing a short film on the key findings of the project to be shared on social media.
- Both of the above to be released at a dissemination symposium on 12th June 2018 at Warwick.
- ‘Consultations’ with conference organisers and HEIs (eg BAICE).
- Presentations and outputs see www.warwick.ac.uk/i2po
- Email e.henderson@warwick.ac.uk to join the project mailing list.