

EDITORIAL

Radical disruptions: Regenerating care-full academic norms

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Introduction

This Special Issue of *Access: Critical explorations of equity in higher education* engages with academic cultures through the conceptual lens of care. Building on Joan Tronto's encompassing definition of care, we understand care as 'the set of activities by which we act to organise our world, so that we can live in it the best way possible' (Tronto 2009, p. 14) and argue that academia represents a fruitful site to explore care work in its complexity and ambiguity. Higher education cultures epitomise a number of well-known tropes and binaries and, as such, offer a rich, heuristic terrain to capture the cultural and organisational norms which feed into processes of exclusion and inclusion. In particular, the association of academic excellence with elitism and masculinity tends to marginalise or, even, exclude certain forms of care work, and demand their invisibility. Being a carer (of a child or an adult, a friend or a relative) can compromise one's association with academic excellence (Moreau 2016). Indeed, in higher education contexts where quality and diversity have historically been construed as antagonistic, carers and groups who do not align neatly with the figure of the 'bachelor boy' (Edward 1993) become 'space invaders' (Puwar 2004) as they threaten to dilute or even 'pollute' the elitism or purity of academic cultures.

Research from this relatively small but quickly growing field highlights how being a carer in academia can be a fraught experience, especially for minoritised groups and those for whom 'care of the self' is rendered necessary, for example because of illness or disability (Burford & Hook 2019). The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic has shed light on this troubled relationship between academic and care work, shifting the attention from the experiences of carers to the centrality of care work in and out of academia. While the policy intervention linked to Covid-19 has considered some forms of care work, other forms have remained broadly misrecognised. Recent research shows, for example, that some dimensions of

caregiving (such as emotional labour) and some types of caring responsibilities (other than the parenting of young, healthy, abled children) remain broadly absent from the policy and scholarly discourses of academia. Claiming an identity as a caregiver risks further marginalising those who are already marginalised because of their positioning within the dominant race, gender, and sexual order (Moreau & Robertson 2017).

This Special Issue engage with ongoing debates among scholars, policy-makers and activists in the field, and how they render in/visible and mis/recognise care/rs through intersectional processes which are gendered, classed, and racialised. These discourses of care work and carers intertwine with dominant political ideologies, for example, the neoliberal discourses which often commodify and marketise equity agendas (Ivancheva, Lynch & Keating 2019), or the conservative, far-right agendas which push for the recruitment of international students, yet demonise migrants and stop them from travelling with their family to their country of destination (Tsegay 2022). Within these discourses, we are interested in looking at ruptures and continuities, such as moving away from special measures under Covid-19, and how these have or have not led to challenging the individualised, deficit discourses which construe care as a burdensome commodity slowing down the neoliberal machine. Yet research shows how care, as work, ethics, and affect, is productive and meaning-making. Thus, at the heart of this Special Issue is a concern for care work in its attachments to in/visibility and mis/recognition as well as care work in its generative capacity on a societal, institutional and individual level (for example when care giving/receiving is associated with personal and professional growth, or with the development of meaningful intra and intergenerational relationships).

Building on earlier work acknowledging that the academic canon reiterates the carefreeness of intellectual thinking and positions excellence as out of reach for many caregivers (Moreau & Galman, 2021), we include contributions which resist care-free and individualistic academic norms, instead renewing with the potentially radical and transformative power of care relations.

Care-full culture and practices in higher education

Research on caregivers often explores the social in/justices experienced by this group, implicitly or sometimes explicitly (for example, when comparing their experiences with those who do not hold significant caring responsibilities). While rendering caregiving experiences visible represents an important phase in the construction of the field, this focus risks constructing carers as the problem, and caring responsibilities as a burden, perpetuating the deficit marking of labour, values, and emotions associated with the ‘feminine’ and, more broadly, with the minoritised and the subalterns (Spivak 1988). It also risks obscuring the complex nature of care work highlighted above (i.e. how it is simultaneously alienating as well as pleasurable, generative, and transformative on an individual, kinship, and broader societal level).

Building on the foundational ideas of Kathleen Lynch (2010), we acknowledge and challenge long-lasting Cartesian assumptions of higher education which claim that scholarly work is separate from emotions, feelings, and reproductive work. Yet this Special Issue also calls for care and carers to be read through intersectional lenses. *Student carers in higher education: Navigating, resisting and redefining academic cultures* (Hook, Moreau & Brooks 2022) contributed an important update to the international scholarly field that examines care in the academy from this intersectional perspective. This collective edition drew attention to the complexities of participation for many student-carers but also foregrounded the possibilities and ethics of building momentum towards a ‘care-centric’ higher education. In particular,

scholars such as Lynch have drawn our attention to the norms and gendered implications of the carelessness of academia and to the multifaceted dimensions and manifestations of care, including in terms of physicality, emotions, feelings and organisational labour (Lynch, Baker & Lyons 2009; Lynch 2010, 2022).

Acknowledging diverse contributions

The contributions featured in this Special Issue adopt an intersectional and thin-grained approach to care in academia and elsewhere. This issue extends existing work by broadening the voices and experiences of care in the academy, therefore examining how care plays out in complex ways in the re/production of identities and in/equalities (Hook, Moreau & Brooks 2022). This issue continues to chart the emergence of more ‘care-full’ academic cultures engaging with diverse experiences and intimate portrayals of negotiating care and academic work. We purposefully make space for meaningful ways which go another step further in advocating for carefulness as business as usual in higher education, and beyond narrowly defined discourses of care linked only to ‘access’ and ‘success’ (Burke 2012; Lynch, Baker & Lyons 2009). Acknowledging that conventional forms of academic writing can be exclusionary, this Special Issue includes a diversity of formats that are mostly missing from academic publications, including kitchen table conversations, group-think critiques and autoethnographic writing.

Sally Welsh - Recognising and reimagining mature students’ unpaid care work as a form of work-based learning

This article examines academic boundaries of the public and private spheres, and who is disadvantaged by this artificial division. In particular, Welsh draws on Gouthro’s critical feminist theory of the homeplace to explore mature students’ experiences of unpaid care work. As Covid-19 promoted homework and home-learning, Welsh outlines how hybrid work and study modes are shaped by unpaid care which remains under-valued and bound to individualised deficit within the academy. Using both narrative data and I-poems, Welsh calls for a reconceptualisation of work-based learning that recognises the contributions of mature-aged students and enhances gender equity.

Rachel MagShamhráin - Care-full academia: From autoethnographic narratives to political manifestos for collective action

In her contribution, MagShamhráin grapples with the impacts of ‘coming out as a carer’ within the academy after sending a mass email to colleagues detailing the complexity of her care arrangements. This article explores the personal cost of this revelation and most effective way of moving beyond a cost-heavy act of individual coming-out that conflict with institutional attitudes to such revelations. Challenging the mythical beast of ‘work-life-balance’, MagShamhráin explores the reliance on autoethnographic research for understanding the public-private question in higher education that requires the forfeiture of a right to privacy. The article seeks to contest the universal design for working in the academy that rewards excess and ways they have navigated the university’s non-recognition of carers.

Anna Wanka, Nathalie Lasser and Moritz Hess - The in/visibilisation of education and care: University staff's perceptions of, experiences with, and reaction to the needs of care-giving students

Aligning strongly to the themes of this Special Issue, Wanka, Lasser, and Hess examine the experiences of carework in the academy beyond its existing focus on parents and children, and explore the experiences of students caring for older adults. Importantly, they contribute a dual perspective, focusing on the institutional systems of universities in Germany that shape the conditions for students caring for older adults as well as highlighting the perspective of academics who engage with these students, and navigate the underlying power relations between them. The article includes data from two focus groups with administrative personnel and another comprising persons holding teaching positions, exploring university staff perceptions, experiences, and reactions towards caregiving students. They astutely use the prompt question – ‘How would you respond if someone brought grandma or grandpa to class?’. Drawing on the conceptual framework of micropolitics, this article highlights the experiences of students who provide informal care to adult family members and friends while also offering a critique of the systemic conditions that facilitate or hinder the reconciliation of studying and caregiving.

Eva-Maria Aigner and Jonas Oßwald - Is it simple to be parents in philosophy? A kitchen table dialogue

Aigner and Oßwald’s article is an intimate exchange that demonstrates the tussle and tension between two academics negotiating their dual and individual conditions of account in higher education. Aigner and Oßwald are a PhD-candidate and a Post-Doc in philosophy while parents to their three-year-old child. They are skewered between the familial and the institutional; precarious temporary employments, scholarship-hopping, and underpaid teaching contracts. Together they share their own personal free-flowing conversation over the kitchen table, where they attempt to make sense of the ethics and contradictions between their university work and their care-work, and who will deal with the vomit from their sick child. The kitchen represents daily unpaid labor and subjugation, but also a place where, historically, those marginalised in philosophy and other academic disciplines often found time to write, think, and read in-between their multiple responsibilities.

Geraldine Mooney - Radical disruptions of a care-less masculinised imaginary of academic identities: Strict divisions of research and organisational labour in higher education

Mooney offers a critique of the gendered nature of ‘academic housekeeping’, drawing on critical and feminist perspectives to scrutinise ‘equity’ in contemporary higher education from the perspective of the multiplicity of care relations that are deeply embedded in all aspects of academic life. Mooney’s article reminds us that the affective labour of care work is necessary to all aspects of academic life, but that sharing of the work of care and affective labour in the academy is not considered the same for everyone employed as an academic today. This article also refutes the myth of a glorious past to call on in regard to an idealised scholarly life. Mooney shares a masculinist reading of care relations and equity in higher education as it plays out in the present thinking system. She continues with a critique of care in the academy from the perspective of the cultural historical context of the past before interrogating the topic using a ‘negative’ or ‘female’ reading as she ‘complexifies’ the problem, to radically disrupt and move beyond hidden assumptions and how we might be best placed to re-generate care-full academic norms.

Margaret W. Sallee, Danielle V. Lewis, and Sara Kieffer - Collapsing borders: How online education shapes student-mothers' experiences in higher education

In this article, Sallee, Lewis and Kieffer explore ways that Covid-19 restrictions heralded a new era for online learning, resulting in both challenges and opportunities to all students, but the authors argue the consequences of this transition to online learning was/is especially heightened for student-parents. Sharing findings from a national, longitudinal study with student-mothers in the United States, the authors examine the challenges students faced engaging in coursework while caring for their children who were at home with them. The authors draw on Clark's work-family border theory which demonstrates how individuals create boundaries between distinct areas of their lives. Their analysis demonstrate how online education enabled student-parents to address their responsibilities by integrating rather than segmenting the competing domains of academia and the family. Although the move to online courses was made both for financial as well as health reasons, ultimately it also proved to be care-full for the participants whose experiences are highlighted in this contribution to this Special Issue.

Katrina McChesney, James Burford, Liezel Frick - Living the best way possible: Distance doctoral students navigating care for others and themselves

In this article, McChesney, Burford, and Frick share care-related insights from an international survey involving 521 doctoral students who undertook their studies wholly or partly off-campus. Over half these respondents had caring responsibilities for others, underlining the importance of distance modes for student carers. Outlining the survey results, the authors highlight that many carer respondents felt distance modes offered the best way possible to organise life, education, and caring responsibilities. Offering an important perspective, the authors include self-care as part of their analysis with a discussion that encompasses students managing specific physical or mental health needs, as well as being proactive in caring for themselves through the challenges of doctoral education. The authors also share insights into un-even distribution of in/visibility of doctoral students and further our understanding through their focus on a sub-group of carers who have experienced relatively less visibility: distance doctoral students with care responsibilities.

Chizuru Noble-Ghelani and Marisa Barnhart - Care as experiential pedagogy: Soil building in social work education

Taking up our invitation for creative and innovative thinking, Noble-Ghelani and Barnhart's contribution draws on the metaphor of hot composting and soil building to offer a new perspective on experiential learning can be deployed in the classroom to cultivate communities of care. As social work scholars and educators, the authors outline how their commitment to care-centered pedagogy is informed by our bodies of intersecting privileges and marginality. Noble-Ghelani and Barnhart use their own exchanges of letters and text messages as moments of witnessing how their co-conceptualisation of care as pedagogy is coming together. In their classrooms, as social work educators, they are not only responsible to care for their students, to meet students in their whole personhood, but they also believe that care itself can be an experiential pedagogy, and the work they do in their classrooms must be aligned to the kinds of principles and actions they want students to take up as they enter their work. Relating this care-full pedagogy to soil and compost, the authors note that preparing the soil is essential if one wants to have good growing conditions, as opposed to compacted soil which they relate to structural violence that has hardened the ground that is shared inside and outside the classroom.

A Western Sydney University Collective: Sky Hugman, Ana Rodas, Leisha Du Preez, Ashlee Gore, Donna James, Julia Kantek, and Anna Leditschke - The day 'care' came up: Agitations for care-full approaches to inspire flourishing academic lives

The 'Super Friends' dialogue shared in this article is a collective conversation that seeks to provoke the imagining and enacting of alternative academic futures. This all-women collective writing group agitates for ethical and pedagogical approaches to writing and its support, and provides a roadmap for collective academic work that we all wish we had access to. The 'Super Friends' group acts as a form of care-full scholarship that seeks to disrupt an increasingly competitive and productionist university landscape underpinned by a masculinised 'carelessness' (Lynch 2010). Also taking up our call for creative contributions, the 'Super Friends' share their writing group impact through poetry and analysis. Linked to carefulness in the academy, the act of offering their writing to the collective, often in very raw states, has forged kinship connections, challenged conventions, and generated alternative ways of working. The writing collective writes to decentre the effects of performance rankings and metrics and the way they permeate writing practices and the prioritisation of the competitive academic, making room for relationality, and against individualised academia.

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