

INEQUALITIES IN PGR WELLBEING

Thirsha de Silva
Dr Charlotte Morris
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OVERVIEW

Welcome and housekeeping

Small group discussions: connecting with colleagues

Presentations

Open discussion forum

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

We'll begin the session today with some small group discussions to connect with one another and begin to think about today's topics.

In your groups, we would love you to share examples from your own practice or experiences which relate to:

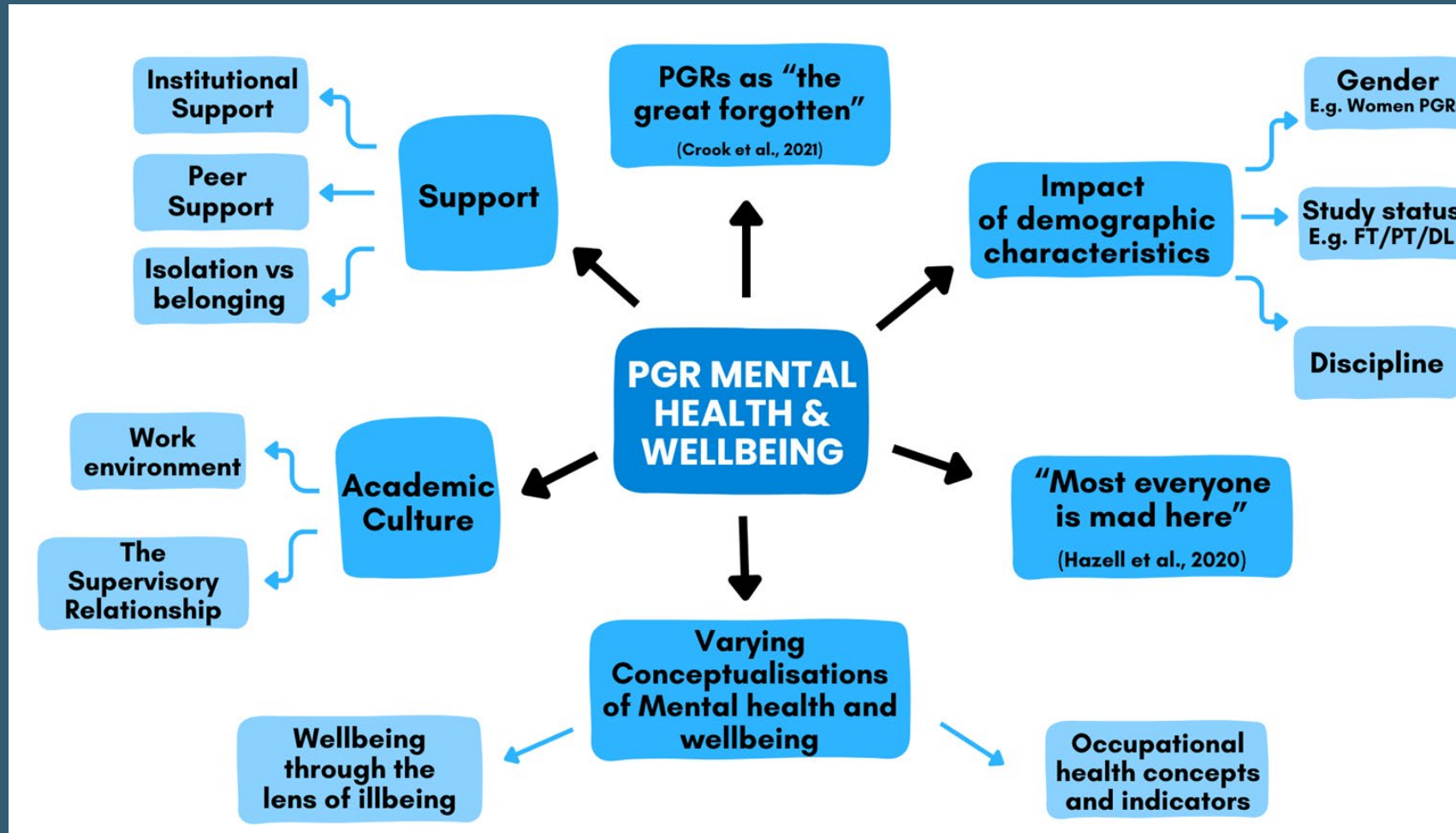
- The different barriers that different PGR students might face
- How these barriers could impact their wellbeing
- What we might be able to do as researchers, practitioners and/or supervisors to disrupt these challenges

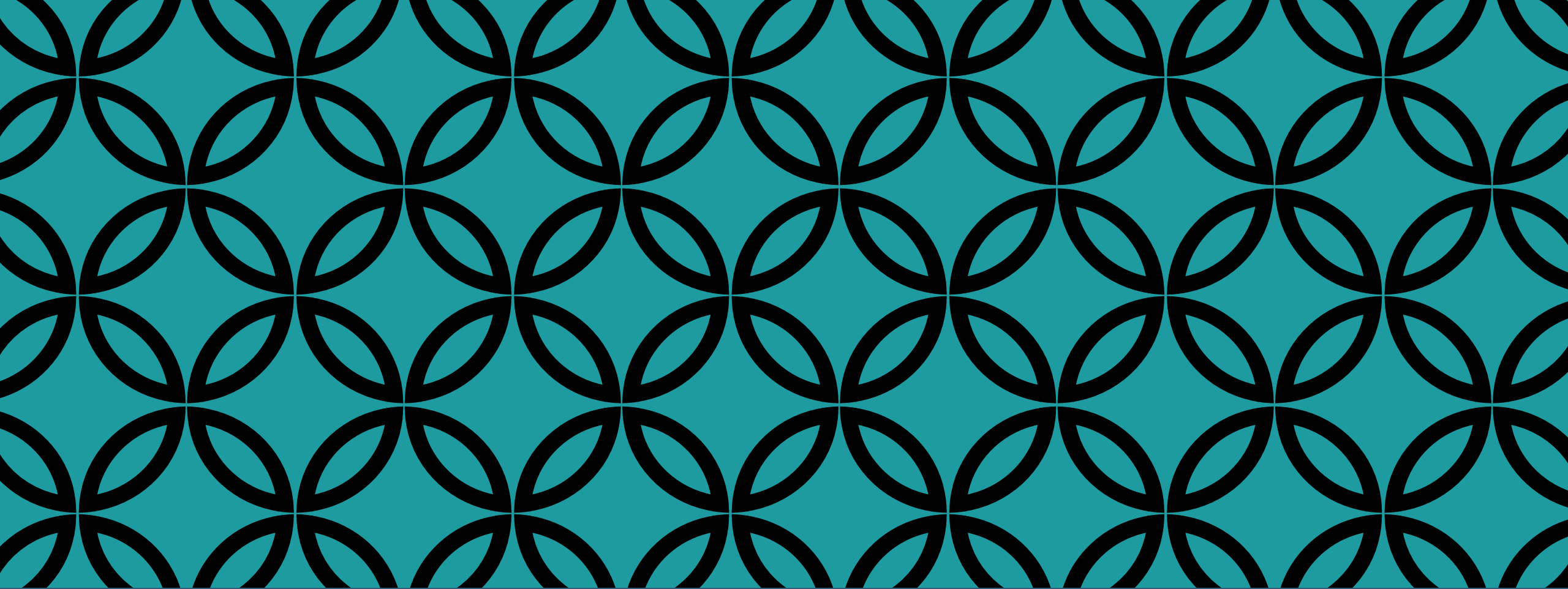


Link for Padlet:

<https://tinyurl.com/3yxh4vsw>

AN OVERVIEW OF THE FIELD





PGR, WELLBEING AND CARE

Dr Charlotte Morris

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

‘Doctoral Learning Journeys’ (2007 - 2010)

‘Troublesome Encounters’ (2010 - 2011)

‘Inclusive Practices to support Student Parents & Carers’ (2015 - 2016)

Supporting early career women academics on non-permanent contracts’ (2019 - 2020).

TIME POVERTY

‘There are so many moving parts... I mean, my diary! The other day a colleague of mine said, ‘your academic diary – that looks very professional.’ I said well if you see what’s in there... buy nappies, pick up from nursery, finish a chapter outline...! So I have to get up very early and drive the kids to a friend’s house - because I have to teach at 9, I wouldn’t make it here on time if I have to drop him off at school so I come here and teach then I will write on my thesis so if I have to mark there’s a lot of admin but if I can leave Fridays and Mondays for writing then I do and then at 2 I have to run and pick my child up from school, I pick up my child and friends’ kids and take them home and then I pick up my other child from nurseary and we all go home, play and have a meal, bedtime routine and then by 9:30 – 10 I pick up on admin from the week that I didn’t get to. There isn’t really a moment where ‘now I’m at work and I can focus on that’ and ‘now I’m at home and I do the home-work’... a lot of the time I’m at the university at my desk and I’m paying the nursery or arranging for the children to be picked up or preparing my class... it kind of feels all very like a big salad!’

(Vikki, 2020 study)

EMOTIONAL DEMANDS

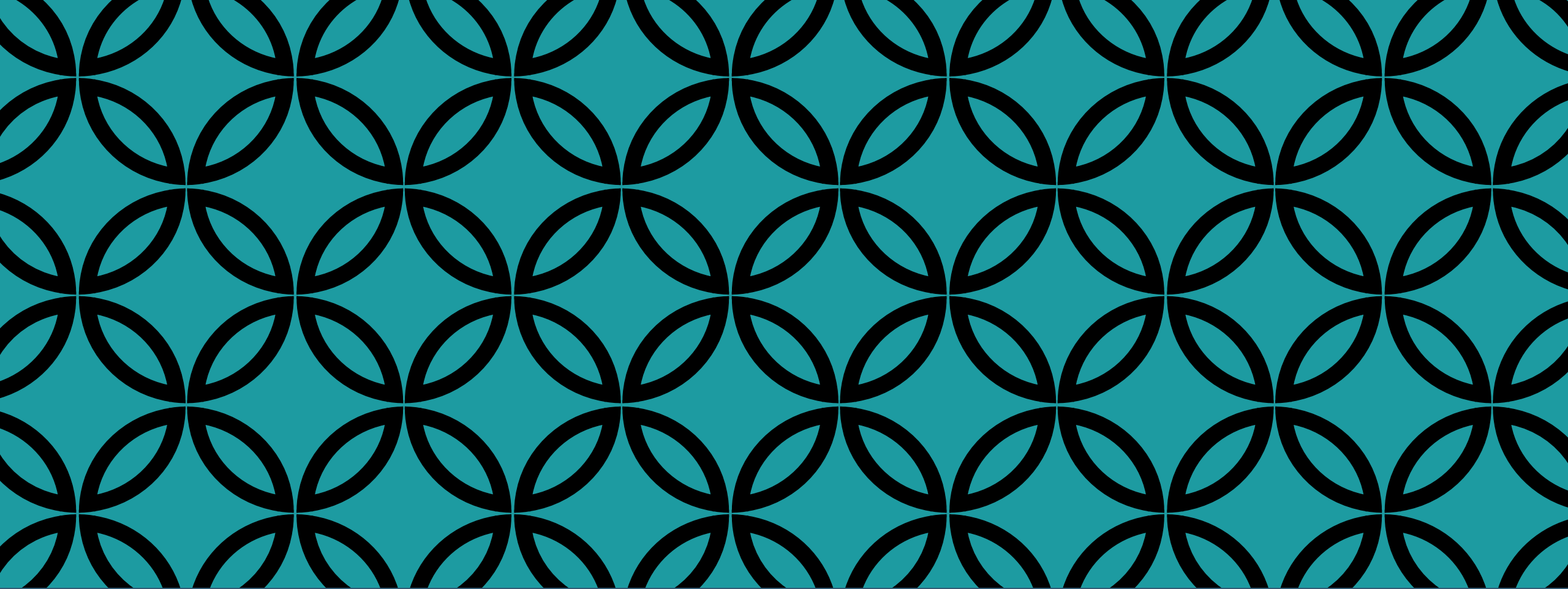
'I think you have to be kind to yourself, which a lot of people aren't very good at doing unfortunately in my experience, particularly women. That sometimes, and you can just know this from the outset, there are gonna be times when it has to go in its box and have the lid put on, and you're gonna have to acknowledge that actually I'm not gonna think about it for a month... so you're a [senior professional], you've got X coming in, you're not gonna do anything on your PhD, you know, and just be kind to yourself and just know that.'

(Sara, 2016 project)

TOWARDS CARE-FULL CULTURES

‘I am not an individual, I am an essential part of a family, and it defines me, and it is the reason I am developing my career. Why not value that? It's very stuffy and unfriendly to children. My children think I've joined the secret service, but I think that's part of a wider culture within the university of seeing parenthood as a problem - to do something about.’

(Tamsin, 2016 project)



SOCIAL CLASS, WELLBEING AND THE JOURNEY INTO PGR

Dr Rosa Marvell

THE STUDY

Wider project – social inequalities and journeys into and through PGT.

42 interviews with first-generation students at 4 UK HEIs

Here, looking at subset of 6 on specific doctoral pathways, comprising:

- 3 students on MRes programmes in post-92 universities (with places/funding for PhD programmes)
- 3 students on research methods MScs as part of 1+3 programmes at Russell Group

UNSETTLING 'SUCCESS' NARRATIVES

Classed & neoliberal patterns of meaning invested in PGR as marker of success/failure – is the call coming from inside the house?

[I] always knew that my aim was a PhD [...] Years and years ago [...] a psychiatrist was being horrible, and it was sort of, like, “You’re never going to do anything, you’re never going to amount to anything, you’re going to be a revolving-door patient” [...] There was something in me when he sort of said that that was like, “Right, I’ll show you” (Ethel, Newnorth)

Potentially a lot at stake for working-class PGR entrants - with MH implications if experience diverges from idealised formations of linear success.

Need for honesty and transparency about routes in and through PGR?

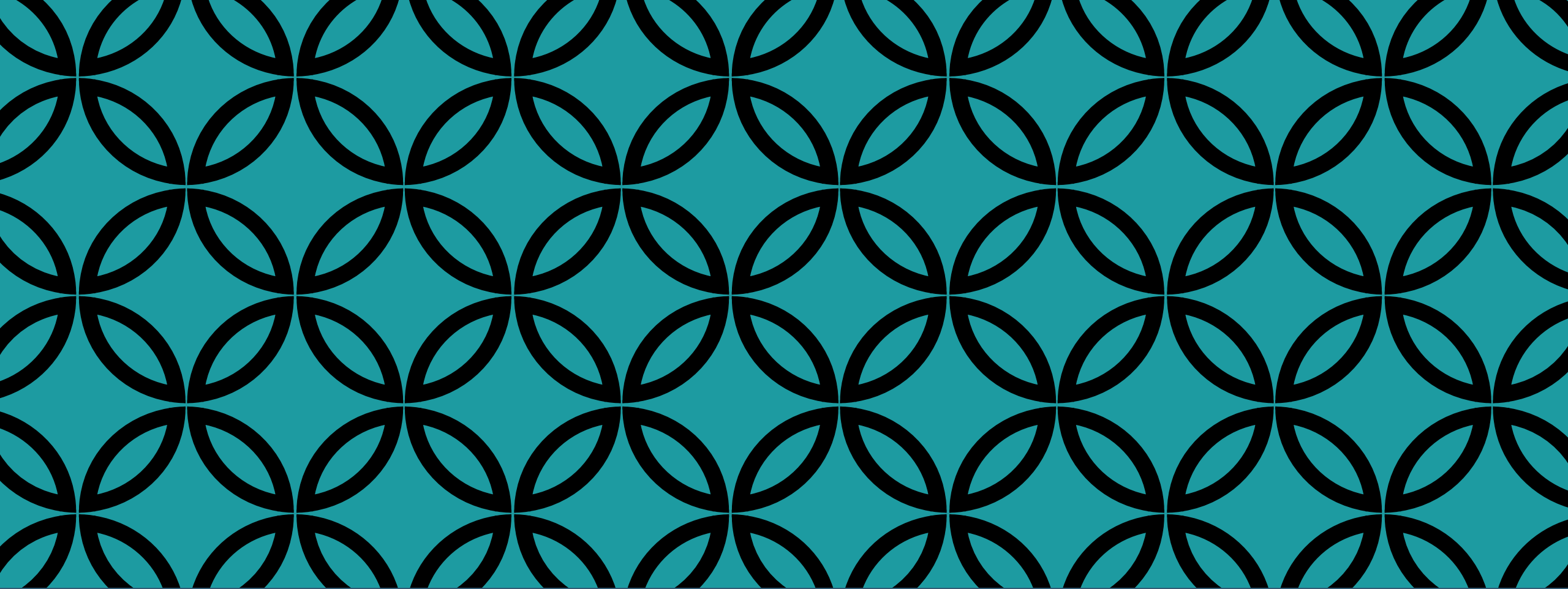
TURBULENT TRANSITIONS

Narratives from people with less linear and more disrupted educational journeys more commonly featured affective moments of doubt, anxiety, stress and imposter syndrome

My MA was a walk in the park [compared to this] [...] I got home the first night and thought, "What have I done?!" [...] It was like going from here to here and there was no ladder (Ethel, Newnorth)

I've spoken to [academic's name] about having imposter syndrome. [...] Without [him], I don't know if I would have done anything [about applying to PGR]... I don't think I'd understand it anywhere near enough, I don't think I'd have had a good a chance. Because I come from a very working-class background, the articulation... (Roger, Newnorth)

Need to resist & challenge how PGR practice (including but not limited to supervision) is exclusionarily designed for middle-class students. Mainstreaming inclusive practice.



WHAT DO WE NOT KNOW?

Thirsha de Silva

GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

Looking beyond the individualised approach to exploring mental health and wellbeing – there is a need to acknowledge the role of social inequalities in our experiences of health and wellbeing.

Looking closely at the impact of the current political environment and academic culture on PGR wellbeing.

Representing different types of PGR experiences in research

- Despite reports such as Metcalfe et al. (2018) identifying PGR groups such as international PGRs, most research tend to represent full-time, UK domiciled PGR experiences
- An intersectional approach to exploring PGR experiences

Broader and more culturally representative conceptualisations of wellbeing

As well as any thoughts/questions you'd have, we'd love to hear about:

- Practices you are aware of that address inequalities & wellbeing for PGR cohorts
- Specific experiences and challenges faced by specific PGR groups - e.g. international students, carers, disabled students, part-time, distance learning...
- Any changes you would like to see, or positive steps we can take together

OPEN DISCUSSION

Thanks for listening! We'd love to hear your thoughts, reflections, contributions and questions