

Dr Chloe Shaw

What is your current position?

Research Associate, University College London

Could you say a bit about your career trajectory so far? How did you get to be where you are today?

I studied Social Psychology at Loughborough University, where I became really interested in the study of conversation, using the methods of discursive psychology and conversation analysis. After University I worked and travelled for a bit, before going back to Loughborough to complete my Masters in Research (MRes) and then my PhD. I chose to study advice giving in telephone conversations between mothers and young-adult-daughters. I was interested in how people construct their relationships through their conversations with each other. Understanding how mundane interactions work is the foundation to exploring more specialized, institutionalized contexts so it provided an important grounding. 'Advice' is also an important topic in health care contexts, enabling my work to be relevant to more applied settings, where I had hoped to make a contribution one day. In the final stages of my PhD I applied for my current position, working on a very relevant topic to advice: 'decision making', and in the neonatal context, where systematic research of this kind has important implications for both parents and doctors.

When did you decide to be an academic? What was it that prompted this decision?

For me, it was not so much as choosing to be an academic, but choosing the area of research that excites me. As an undergraduate I had some very inspiring lecturers who taught me some fascinating topics, many of which helped to deconstruct everyday assumptions about social norms. I remember sitting at the back of a lecture one day and thinking how awesome it would be to be thinking about, researching and teaching this kind of thing for a living. I graduated in 2006 and after a bit of travelling (which I still get to do a fair bit of as a researcher!) I am very grateful to still be thinking about, researching and teaching what I love.

What have been the challenges so far in your career in academia?

Some of the scariest things have actually ended up to be surprisingly enjoyable and rewarding – like presenting research at conferences and seminars. I think the bigger challenges can often be the smaller, daily ones, like learning to be confident with your work without always needing feedback; keeping a work-life balance and not being overwhelmed by the uncertainty that comes with exploring new territory.

What advice would/do you give to other female academics?

Keep being inspired and driven by the topics that you are interested in and passionate about. Manage your time carefully so that you avoid becoming overwhelmed with the big picture. Take as many opportunities as you can to connect with other academics; to share and develop different research interests, but also to allow you to feel part of a community.