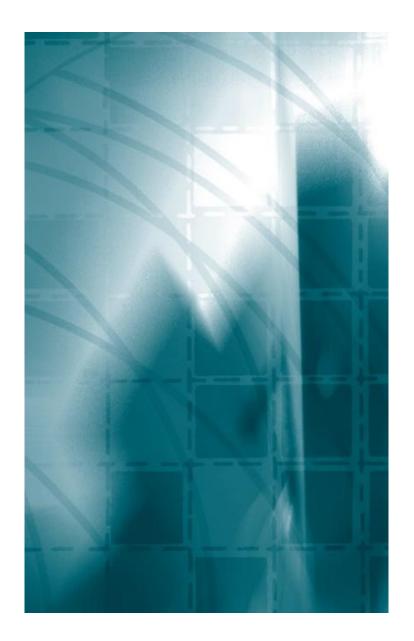# Work, Employment and Society
Annual Conference 2025

Abstract Book
Wednesday 10 September 2025

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Abstracts are listed by Paper Session then alphabetically by Stream Name.

WELCOME

Welcome to the Work, Employment and Society Annual Conference 2025 at University of Manchester. The theme of the 2025 conference is 'Continuities and Discontinuities in Work and Employment'. It is a pleasure to announce our two plenary panels:

Our opening panel 'Continuities and Discontinuities in Life, Work and Employment' will be given by Jean Jenkins and Miguel Martinez Lucio.

Our closing panel 'Rethinking continuities and discontinuities: work & employment futures' will be given by Manjo Dias-Abey, Eleanor Kirk, and Pratima Sambajee.

The programme also includes a variety of special events, journal events and PhD Showcase presentations.

This conference offers a rich and challenging programme and it is hoped that every delegate will find sessions of interest.

A conference of this breadth depends on the efforts of many committed individuals. Significant thanks are due to all those who have helped with the organisation of the conference, particularly the committee members:

Chris Chan, *Royal Holloway, University of London*

Susan Kirk, *Newcastle University*

Marti Lopez-Andreu, *Newcastle University*

Toma Pustelnikovaite, *Cardiff University*

Jenny Rodriguez, *University of Manchester*

SPONSORS

We would like to express our appreciation for the support of our sponsors and exhibitors. The Exhibition Area includes exhibitions from organisations that offer services and information for conference delegates. Please take some time between sessions to visit these exhibitors.

Main Conference Sponsor

Sage Publications

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The BSA would like to thank SAGE Publishing for funding a portion of the free places for this year's conference.

Sponsors and Exhibitors

Bristol University Press

Bristol University Press is dedicated to publishing highest-quality social science research that drives real-world impact. Meet us at BSA to explore our latest books and journals, including the new Creative Research Methods Journal, get a conference discount on books and discuss your publishing projects, including open access option.

Bristol University Press is offering a 50% special pre-order discount for *UberTherapy: The New Business of Mental Health* by Elizabeth Cotton, which will have a launch event on Monday, Paper Session Two. Use code BUP10 on bristoluniversitypress.co.uk by 31 October 2025.

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IMPORTANT DELEGATE INFORMATION

Arrival and Registration

Please collect your badge promptly on arrival and step away from the desk to allow others to register. Feel free to grab some refreshments, explore the venue or take a moment to familiarise yourself with the programme.

Your badge must be worn at all times for security and meal access.

Registration will take place in The Drum, University Place:

Monday 8 September from 09:00

Tuesday 9 September from 08:00

Wednesday 10 September from 08:00

Venue Details

Venue address: University Place, 176 Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL

What3Words: ///parade.paint.washed

Directions:
- Interactive map
- Travel by train
- Travel by bus, tram or coach
- Travel by car
- Travel by air
- Travel by bicycle

Virtual Tour of University Place: https://www.conference.manchester.ac.uk/virtual-tours/universityplace/

Sessions will take place in various rooms at University Place.

Chairing

We are extremely grateful to all those who have agreed to chair one or more sessions. If you find yourself in a session without a chair we would be grateful if someone in the audience could volunteer to take this role. Chairing guidelines will be available in each room and a copy is also available here.

Meals and Refreshments

Tea and coffee	Throughout the conference	The Drum
Lunch	12:30-13:30 on Monday 8 September	The Marketplace Restaurant
	12:30-13:30 on Tuesday 9 September	The Marketplace Restaurant
	13:30-14:30 on Wednesday 10 September	The Marketplace Restaurant

Vegetarian and vegan options will be available as part of the standard catering provision. If you have notified us of any other specific dietary requirements, please make these known to the catering staff when collecting your meals and refreshments.

Your badge must be worn to access refreshments.

No breakfast or evening meals are included in your registration. Manchester offers a wide range of local dining options nearby.

Wellbeing and Reflection Spaces

We recognise that conferences can be full-on, and we want to support your wellbeing throughout the event. Whether you're looking for a moment of quiet, a space for prayer or reflection or time to recharge outdoors, a range of supportive environments are available during the conference.

Quiet Room
We have allocated a room for those seeking quiet time at the conference and this can be found in University Place Room 4.212.

Prayer Room
A dedicated prayer room is available in Room 4.213.

Mothering Room
A mothering room will be provided in Room 4.210.

Green space
There is plenty of green space to enjoy around the conference site as shown on this virtual tour of the university: https://www.manchester.ac.uk/study/virtual/360-tours/parks-outdoor/

Cloakroom

A free cloakroom is available in The Drum, University Place. Please note items are left at your own risk. Opening hours are:

Monday: 08:00 - 20:00

Tuesday: 08:00 - 19:00

Wednesday: 08:00 - 18:30

Publicity

Share your experience using #wesconf25 on social media!

PAPER SESSION 8
09:00-10:30

Difference, Diversity & Social Justice – Room 3.205

Tensions in LGBT+ Employee Networks

Anna Einarsdottir, Karen Mumford

(University of York)

In a context sceptical of equality and diversity policies which appear to have limited or no substance (Hoque & Noon, 2004), this paper offers insights into programmes specifically tailored to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) employees: LGBT+ staff networks. While practitioner-based scholarship remains optimistic about the scope and potential impact of staff networks (Cross & Armstrong, 2008; Fullerton, 2013; Inko-Tariah, 2015; Kulkarni, 2012; Sprinks, 2011), the evidence to support this is both partial and mixed. On the one hand, networks are reported to offer career opportunities for group members (Friedman, Kane, & Cornfield, 1998), increase the visibility of gender and sexual minorities in the workplace (Colgan & McKearney, 2012; McFadden & Crowley-Henry, 2018), build community and give voice to otherwise silenced LGBT+ individuals and groups (Colgan & McKearney, 2012). On the other hand, questions have been raised about network independence (from management) (Colgan, Creegan, McKearney, & Wright, 2008; Lindsay, Munro, & Wise, 2007) and the fact that membership may not help to reduce isolation of minority employees as they were originally intended to (Friedman et al., 1998). Our own work has further exposed lack of diversity within networks, limited use of outreach programmes to improve diversity profile of networks (Einarsdóttir, Mumford, Birks, Aguirre, Lockyer, & Sayli, 2022) and surprisingly little discussion about identities at meetings (Einarsdóttir, Mumford, Birks, Lockyer, & Sayli, 2022) in a culture dominated by what we refer to as 'consensus politics'.

In this paper we examine how LGBT+ employee networks (mis)manage tensions and the extent of which debates are welcomed at meetings. Resting on a major ESRC funded study into LGBT+ Networks operating within the National Health Service (NHS) in Britain, we report on nine case studies, comprising both observations from network activities and interviews. The analysis is based on semi-structured interviews (45), transcripts of meetings (25) and our own fieldnotes (18), covering both responses when asked directly about disagreement and debates in networks, as well as how debates and tensions build and unfold at meetings. Preliminary analysis shows a significant disconnect between the interview data and debates and/or tensions at network meetings. While interviewees referred to 'interesting debates', for example, about executive sponsors attending meetings and what networks should be called, and in general who the network should be open to, issues were not necessarily resolved at meetings, but 'brushed aside', and reappeared when a member had left, or the network was chaired by a different person. In exploring how debates, disagreement and tensions were framed and subsequently (un)resolved (continued or discontinued) in LGBT+ employee networks, we envisage to make two key contributions. Firstly, illustrating the effects of adopting a consensus approach in dealing with tension, differences and conflict, ignoring different, and at times, conflicting interests between networks, organisations and members. Secondly, using both consensus and conflict theory to explain how differences are (mis)managed in LGBT+ networks.

Reference list available on request.

Queer Safety and Regulation in Small and Medium Enterprises

Helen Williams, Katrina Pritchard

(Swansea University)

We explore LGBTQIA+ workers' experiences of safety at work in small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the UK. Our SME context is significant since much research on LGBTQIA+ experiences is situated in larger organisations, resulting in recommendations that are often unachievable for smaller firms. Consequently, we ask what are LGBTQIA+ experiences of workplace safety in SMEs? To explore this, we conducted narrative analysis (Cinque et al., 2024) of 30 semi-structured interviews.

Historic discussions of safety focus on work's physicality, subsequently extending to examine both collective safety climate (Griffin & Curcurato, 2016) and individual psychological safety (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023). However, this rarely considers diverse experiences and often commonly understood via theorisations of minority stress (Frost & Meyer, 2023). Despite significant research exploring minority stress with gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees, critics contend that this has significant limitations for understanding the diverse LGBTQIA+ community. Nevertheless it is well documented that LGBTQIA+ workers find workplaces unsafe (Weber, 2023; Rostosky et al., 2023).

Current constructions of safe workplaces constitute homogenised modes of tolerance (including policies and practices) reproducing cis-hetero dominant ideologies (Corlett et al., 2023; Hennekam & Köllen, 2023). Studies on specific spaces, such as workplace bathrooms or locker rooms (Worst & O'Shea, 2020; Resnick & Galupo, 2019) highlight how these reinforce gender binaries. Moreover, scholars examining organisational practices demonstrate how they work in emphasising sexuality binaries, with heterosexuality as the privileged standard (Resnick & Galupo, 2019).

Our work builds on this heritage of queer theory and engages theoretically with emerging conceptualisations of queer space. Schram (2019: 603) suggests that queer identities at work are subject to 'straightening devices'. Thus, workspaces recursively reinforce gender norms (Ashraf, 2023) in being cisnormative (Suárez et al., 2022), cisgendered (Hines, 2019) and heteronormative (Skoglund & Holt, 2021). However, McCarten and Nash (2023) posit that queer and safe spaces might be conceptually paradoxical since the latter require rules and regulation. Thus, queer spaces - which are often assumed as safe(r) can act to reproduce power relations founded on the heteronormative formation of identities, recreating hierarchies and forms of exclusion (McCarten & Nash, 2023).

Our analysis explores three narrative themes:
- Approaching spaces: our SME participants either did not have a fixed place of work or needed to engage with many different workspaces. Participants discussed wariness of the unknown, needing to protect themselves and the significant effort involved in this additional work.
- Being unsafe: how feeling unsafe is often dismissed by others and explored the different ways that this can escalate
- Keeping safe(r): Here we analyse how participants try to fit and contort themselves to others' expectations in attempts to feel safe(r)

From this work we offer three contributions. Firstly, we offer new insights into processes of LGBTQIA+ identity regulation at work. Secondly, we identify different forms of queer labouring, proposing that LGBTQIA+ workers are caught in a perpetual double bind. Thirdly, we unpack the ways in which the complex mangling of workspaces results in potentially unsatisfactory, fragile, and temporary assemblages of queerness.

PhD Showcase

We Are What We Wear: The Entanglement of Appearance and Identity at Work for LGBTQIA+ and Non-binary Creatives

Alice Elworthy

(Swansea University)

This research contributes to understanding how appearance and identity intersect at work for LGBTQIA+ and non-binary creative workers. Using semi-structured interviews that incorporate participant-led photo-elicitation methods, this research considers the following overarching research question: In what ways does appearance matter to LGBTQIA+ and non-binary creatives at work?

The idea of the gendered body and how that impacts an individual's experiences of the world are inextricably linked, with those not conforming to binary ideas of gender facing experiences of discrimination (Sharp et al., 2022; Bates et al., 2021; Suárez et al., 2022). The experiences of the gendered body can be further reflected through clothing, accessories, makeup and tattoos (Banet-

Weiser, 2018), identified here as 'appearance' (Stanko et al., 2022). Furthermore, Fleetwood- Smith et al. (2019) reinforce the premise that clothing is a vital part of our identity, evoking an emotional response from the wearer. However, 'work' is considered to stifle identity expression through appearance (Richards & Mattioli, 2021). As a result, this research seeks to understand the experiences of creative workers specifically, as appearance is often fundamental to their work.

To better understand the complexity of the connection between gender, sexuality and appearance for LGBTQIA+ and non-binary creative workers, I will be exploring the material connection between appearance and identity (Barad, 2003, 2007). Materiality helps to unpack how connections are made between the material and the body, known as entanglements (Klepp & Bierck, 2014; van Amsterdam et al., 2023; Barad, 2003). As a result, the connections made between clothing and the body generate both desired and undesired appearances that the individual negotiates. This research brings together discursive constructions of identity through the material experiences of clothing and accessories.

Analysis of the data collected further unpacks the entangled nature of identity and appearance for LGBTQIA+ and non-binary creative workers. Although participants discussions of gender seek to move beyond binary expectations of gender, the language utilised was mostly shaped by both masculine and feminine discourses. This further indicates that there is a material-discursive entanglement between gender, sexuality and appearance. Participants frame how creative work enables them the freedom to curate an appearance that is representative of their identity. By having choice over the entanglements that are created between clothing and the body, positive workplace experiences were created for the participants.

To conclude, through focusing on clothing and accessories, this research offers an empirical exploration of how appearance matters to LGBTQIA+ and non-binary creatives at work. The data highlights how appearance was not only able to reflect the participants sexuality and gender, but also their identity as creative workers, further offering an intersectional outlook on how appearance and identity intersect. As a result, this research further supports that appearance can reflect an individual's identity, as creative work offered participants an outlet to be open about their gender and sexuality through their individual curations of appearance.

(Dis)Continuities in Professions, Occupations & Skills 1 – Room 3.209

Opportunity or Threat? Role Ambiguity, Power Differentials and Job Crafting in the Implementation of New Roles in Primary Care

Abigail Tazzyman, Damian Hodgson, Pauline Nelson, Fay Bradley, Lisa Brunton, Jane Ferguson

(University of Sheffield)

In response to recruitment and retention issues in the national health system, NHS England attempted to 'improve access to primary care' by 'expanding the workforce' in English primary care through the introduction of multiple new roles, primarily into general practice (NHS England 2016; Primary Care Workforce Commission 2015). This has involved the introduction of clinical and non-clinical staff from various occupational or educational backgrounds to gap-fill and absorb workload (Nelson et al, 2018; Francetic et al, 2022). This approach is not unique to the UK or healthcare. In healthcare this can be seen internationally in both secondary and primary care (Grol et al 2021; Marier 2015; Hazen et al 2018; Freund et al 2015). Across a range of other professional fields, including law, accounting and higher education, similar efforts to increase labour supply by introducing new subordinate, usually semi-professional, roles can be seen (Kellogg 2019; Holvast and Lindeman 2020; Ackroyd and Muzio 2007).

Introducing new roles can challenge existing professional and organisational practices and disrupt professional hierarchies and jurisdictions (Bos-de Vos et al, 2019; Nelson et al, 2019; Hendrikx, 2017). How roles are designed and their relation to other roles, both in terms of jurisdiction (field of practice) and power in a given context, is key to the success of their implementation and quality. Successful integration of new semi-professionals or non-professionals presupposes that those working in the field understand the purpose of a role, how to operationalise it and how it fits in the context, and also that staff in new roles can establish a distinctive professional or occupational identity and jurisdiction.

However, not all roles are equal nor designed equally and the introduction of different roles generates different problems and opportunities.

Drawing on interviews with 126 participants in English primary care, the article analyses the introduction of new roles to understand role change amid role ambiguity in a context of competing professional interests and hierarchies. We examine role ambiguity and job crafting through the lens of power, to explain how role ambiguity can be both an opportunity and a threat. Applying Bucher et al's theory of power (2016), including status and field centrality, to a role theory approach on ambiguity (Biddle et al 1986; Kahn et al., 1964; King and King, 1990; Ebbers & Wijnberg 2017), we argue that this helps to explain how different groups (professional/ semi-professional/ non-professional) are able to engage in job crafting to different degrees, and with various degrees of success. We demonstrate role ambiguity to be a differential experience, and evidence power to be the moderating factor for how ambiguity is experienced, with both positive and negative consequences, for those in new roles. Through this approach we articulate the tensions between role theory and job crafting approaches to ambiguity, and why role ambiguity is experienced differently. We show that the interaction between power and ambiguity is key for the degree and form of job crafting that can be undertaken by those in a given role.

Postal Work and Modernization: Identity, Culture and Public Service

Dan Forbes

(University of Kent)

From the 1960s onwards, the postal service came under increasing pressure to commercialize. This pressure intensified in relation to wider macro-structural changes from the mid-1970s. 1979 brought a new political climate, with the election victory of Margaret Thatcher and the advent of a distinct neoliberal ethos, entailing managerialist reform within public services. For the postal service, this meant that from the 1980s a programme of modernization was embarked upon, aimed towards transforming both working practices and working culture.

The research is my completed PhD and is an oral history case study of postal workers who worked at Royal Mail between 1970-2000, conducted in the semi-rural, former mining area of Cannock Chase, Staffordshire. Interview data was supplemented with documentary research, carried out at the Royal Mail archive.

My research is based in the 'end of work' debate (Beck, 2000; Bauman, 1998; 2005; Gorz, 1999), building on the work of Strangleman (2004; 2007; 2012) on occupational culture and identity and post-industrialization. I incorporate a novel workplace into this debate, integrating the significance of the public service ethic (Perry, 1996; Perry and Hondeghem, 2008) to issues of identity, culture and generalized individualization. I demonstrate how the service ethic can act as a resource in modernization processes and the negotiation of identity and apply conceptualizations of the loss of professional autonomy to advancing managerialism (Gill-McLure and Seifert, 2008; Leicht et al, 2009; Coffey et al 2009) in the context of unskilled work. My research is based in the routines of everyday life, and practices of daily labour.

Postal workers interviewed displayed a strong identification with their labour. The service ethic was the significant element in that identification, providing them with meaning and external recognition. The working culture enabled this ethic through the normalization of carrying out forms of community (non)work. This was an important aspect of postal work, whilst not being an official part of duties. This is seen in context of the post-World War Two society: a society of greater social connectedness, with these ideals institutionally entrenched in the welfare state.

The working culture of postal workers was tight knit, with a collaborative and cooperative approach to work, with workers considering themselves a 'workplace family. However, this tight culture was also one that could operate along exclusionary lines, with more opportunity afforded to male workers, and a lack of ethnic diversity (though this area was not very ethnically diverse at this time).

But whereas modernization undermined identification and eroded the working culture, this was not a story of complete transformation. There were significant continuities with the past. Modernization had begun to break down processes of intergenerational transmission of the working cultural, but it was obdurate and persisted. Though the intensification of work meant that postal workers had less time in their daily labour to practice these forms of community (non)work, they found ways to carry on these

performances, albeit in diminished form. In addition, the public service ethic acted as a resource against the damaging effects of modernization in terms of identity.

Discretion and Power in Work: 'Thinking Professionals' and Confused Managers in the Fire and Rescue Service

Irena Grugulis, Hugh Cook, James Brooks

(University of Leeds)

Discretion and autonomy are central to work (Fox, 1974; 1966). There are many studies of declining discretion (Braverman, 1974; Taylor and Bain, 1999; Joyce et al, 2023; Felstead et al., 2002; Henseke et al., 2018) but few of attempts to increase discretion. This paper attempts to address that gap and examines an attempt to increase the discretion that firefighters could exercise in work. It argues that front-line discretion was inextricably intertwined with organisational power relations and that increasing firefighters' freedom of action raised issues for management. Actions which would previously have been grounds for disciplinary action were now harder to classify. Subjected to this confusion, firefighters relied on moral standards to gauge their own behaviours. Their core task was to save lives and protect the public. Disciplinaries were a secondary consideration.

This paper is taken from an ongoing longitudinal study. Phases one, two and three involved 126 interviews with 74 firefighters, four months observation of a watch, participation in a 'live burn', access to training and development records, and shadowing the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, who kept a diary. The current fourth phase involves interviews with FBU officials and firefighters.

The paper starts by mapping firefighters' shift from following orders to thinking professionals, expected to make their own judgements and to challenge instructions they felt to be unsafe. Guidelines were valued but would be adapted if required. Firefighters considered themselves practical problem solvers and used their equipment, knowledge and skills creatively to deal with incidents. Where appropriate they would stick to the guidelines: at major incidents with multiple teams; working with new or novice partners; and when "an arse covering exercise" (Firefighter 42, 11 years' service) was needed.

While this increase in discretion was planned, the managerial response did not seem to be and neither they, nor the front-line firefighters, were clear about where the new boundaries were drawn. Firefighters joked about facing medals or the sack, disciplinary actions were started by one manager and stopped by another, and one crew was told that head office would like to give them a commendation but could not be seen to reward firefighters going outside the guidelines. Occasionally management's response was performative, as when a crew commander was disciplined because his actions were caught on camera, but most of the time they seemed simply confused.

Faced with this uncertainty, firefighters developed their own moral guidelines, focused on saving lives and protecting the public. As one said: "I'd rather take a telling off at the end of the day, than having to see somebody die" (Firefighter 46, 22 years' service).

The paper contributes in three ways: (i) empirically it provides a detailed account of the ways firefighters exercised discretion in work, examining the reasons why they might step outside or remain within official guidelines; (ii) it shows the confusion that increasing front-line discretion creates among managers; and (iii) theoretically, it contributes to the literature on discretion by locating these findings in existing power relations and showing the connections between power and discretion.

Crafting Continuity: How a 500-Year-Old Guild Navigates Space, Memory and Change

Toma Pustelnikovaite

(Cardiff University)

This paper examines TradeInc, a 500-year-old organisation based in Scotland. Historically, TradeInc was a craft guild, and the structure and norms of a guild remain key to its identity: autonomy, solidarity, responsibility and morality are treated not only as societal ends to be promoted but also as something to be incorporated in its modus operandi. However, changes in the regulatory environment shifted the organisation's purpose from that of (primarily) protecting master craftsmen interests to being a charitable organisation. In addition, TradeInc's composite trades – hammermen, bonnetmakers,

glovers, shoemakers, weavers, bakers, butchers, tailors and dyers – were once prominent and respectable professions in the city but are now gradually becoming marginalised or disappearing, threatening TradeInc's existence and purpose. Finding itself in a crisis, the organisation was pushed to seek ways to adapt to present and future times whilst keeping its historical foundations.

This paper is specifically interested in how the organisation used space in navigating between historical continuity and change in its activities. Like other guilds, TradeInc used to have a close link with the city where it is located, and with the city's governance. The organisation also had a say in the religious affairs, having supported the building of a local church. While various formal privileges of the guild have long ended, the organisation's involvement in both areas has not. However, TradeInc has lost its 'place' in the city. The building erected for the meetings of the organisation has been demolished, leaving the organisation without a physical location for its activities, and reliant on city's spaces, objects and collective memory to survive as an organisation. To understand the role of space in the preservation of the ancient organisation, the paper will draw on the concept of (organisational) liminality (Söderlund and Borg 2018; Garsten 1999), seeing TradeInc as being in a liminal position between the past and the present, between survival and demise, and between the secular and the religious worlds.

Data collection consisted of a year-long ethnographic study. The researcher observed 19 TradeInc events and meetings (~75 hours), making detailed records of observations. This data was complemented by a guided tour of the cemetery linked with TradeInc, a visit to the church associated with TradeInc, as well as a visit to the TradeInc exhibition. In addition, 40 semi-structured interviews with members of TradeInc were conducted (~45 hours). Furthermore, the researcher analysed textual data, such as archival documents, historical studies of the organisation, minutes of meetings, committee documents, member newsletters and email communications. Visual data and artefacts, such as pictures of organisational spaces and objects, were also included in the analysis.

Findings show how TradeInc engaged with civic, private, spiritual and digital spaces and selectively deployed history to secure the future for the organisation and its composite trades. They highlight the role of absence in producing organising effects (Giovannoni and Quattrone 2017), and contribute to scholarship on memory and space in occupations (e.g. Aroles et al 2024; Siebert et al 2017).

(Dis)Continuities in Professions, Occupations & Skills 2 – Room 3.210

Emotional Labour and (Dis)Continuities in the Lives of Lecturers in Public Universities in Thailand

Sudthasiri Siriviriyakul, Fon Ninkhate

(Thammasat University)

This research investigated the emotional labour of lecturers in public universities in Thailand. The data were collected from 11 Thai lecturers using semi-structured interviews with participant-produced drawings. We explored what emotions were expressed, the expectations from various stakeholders such as students, universities, and the society, as well as how lecturers constructed their sense of self vis-a-vis these expectations. Preliminary analysis found that lecturers in Thailand engaged in emotional labour through various factors. Firstly, emotional labour appeared to be linked with work intensification. Lecturers described multiple roles, many deadlines, imbalance between work and private lives. Some participants reflected the loss of personal self (and happiness) as a tradeoff for professional expectations. The multiplicity of roles was, in many ways, due to the pressure of accreditation and quality control systems to meet both national and international standards. This resulted in lecturers having to produce research publications, attend meetings for curriculum development, ensure teaching quality, and perform other administrative roles. Secondly, the cultural discourse in Thailand where teachers or lecturers need to be role models (or literally the 'mould') of future generations played a role in shaping what the society expected Thai lecturers to be. To some extent, participants were expected to behave in certain ways in front of students and in the public. Thirdly, participants in our study also reported the expected values (and emotions) of care and empathy as being a 'safe zone' to students. Examples from the interviews showed accounts of lecturers sacrificing their non-work time, even late at night, to meet students' needs, listen to their problems, and give advice on personal issues, to name

a few. This made the boundaries between Thai lecturers and students unclear. Participants mentioned being 'exhausted' from this 'always-on' culture where the professional demands made their presence as 'discontinuities' in their private lives at home. As such, balancing work and family lives was challenging. Some lecturers revealed a sense of regrets towards their families where they failed to spend quality time with their loved ones, who later passed away. This, however, has become their turning point to see the professional identity in a new light and try to find a better balance. Nevertheless, setting boundaries in the lives of Thai lecturers represented continuous efforts, which several participants still struggled with. The visual data supported verbal accounts of lecturers in this sample and illustrated multi-faceted emotions, multiple roles, unknown trajectories, and non-work aspects. Overall, this research contributed to an ongoing discussion on emotional labour in the field of higher education, which has not gained much attention from scholars in work and employment. The findings also pointed to the importance of cultural values, along with organisational demands forced by quality assurance policies nationally and internationally, that can influence how individuals perform emotional labour and construct their professional identity. Finally, this study also offered a methodological contribution, using participant-produced drawings as part of interviews, for scholars exploring professional experience, identities, and emotions where the complex, oftentimes ineffable accounts can be captured and reflected through this visual technique.

From Serving the Citizen to Becoming an Outsider: An Exploration of Changing Occupational Community in Swedish Policing

Joel Nilsson

(Lund University)

Police work was once held as the archetype of occupational community (Banton, 1974), centred around a clear occupational identity (Van Maanen, 1975) tied to a constitutive element of the state: reducing crime and providing safety to the public. Following a series of public reforms across Europe, police authorities have undergone transformative changes that mark a breakage with traditional work practices. The shift towards more distant, impersonal, and decontextualized policing arrangements (Terpstra et al., 2019) is arguably reshaping the value base and the collective nature of work at its core. Given the unique nature of the police, highlighted by the exclusive mandate of coercive force and work practices where close relationships between colleagues may ultimately be the difference between life and death, further scrutiny is warranted.

In this study, the occupational community among police officers in the Swedish Police is explored in depth. The members of an occupational community share a set of values born out of shared experiences and histories, thereby highlighting a sense of distinctiveness from non-members (Salaman, 1974) and emotional attachment to work (McLachlan et al. 2019). Previous research has discerned how such collective dispositions may, over time, shape the worker's interpretation and subsequent navigation of changes within employment arrangements (MacKenzie et al., 2017; Strangleman, 2012). By considering the dialectic relationship between occupational identity and the navigation of change (MacKenzie & Marks, 2019), the study examined how values underpinning occupational identity came to be rearticulated, which marked changes in the solidaristic bonds between colleagues (Beck & Brooks, 2020). The data come from 71 work-life biographical interviews with police officers, which includes active, retired, and some officers who had left the force.

The findings showed that the notion of serving the citizen is the guiding principle and bedrock of occupational identity for police officers. This signified a common set of values that united all respondents. The findings further elaborate on the collective underpinnings of policing which coalesce around the interaction among colleagues, thus materializing in a shared meaning structure that enabled the mutual provision of emotional and material support.

However, the implementation of a large public reform, characterized by centralization interests and shifted priorities, was a turning point in the participant's biographies. Nearly all respondents recollected a disorientated tenure, experiencing negative emotions and detachment from work. Although much returned to normal after a couple of years, further analysis showed that changes in the occupational identity affected the occupational community. Biographical recollections established how police officers had moved from an insider to an outsider position in the occupational system (Salaman, 1974), thereby experiencing increasing distance to the citizens they were determined to serve, and detachment from colleagues. While some decided to change role within the police in order to once again be part of the

community, others left the organization in order to maintain their occupational identity. As serving the citizens is part of the occupational identity, the study points toward a potential conflict between serving the community and upholding camaraderie.

Motherhood, Career-breaks and Returning to the Workplace: Challenges and Strategies of Professional Women in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Reem Alothmany, Renu Gupta

(King Abdulaziz University)

Launched in 2016, Saudi Vision 2030 achieved its target of attaining 30% women in the KSA workforce in 2020, well ahead of the planned schedule. The introduction of reforms such as childcare support and flexible working conditions to facilitate women's and mothers' active participation in the workforce has been an instrumental part of Vision 2030. However, an organisational culture representative of Acker's (1990) 'ideal worker' alongside the cultural, political and religious context in KSA creates particular challenges for Saudi women in creating and developing a career path (Sian et al., 2020). According to the PwC (2024) report, Saudi women are more likely to take career breaks, but less likely to return to work. While 55% of surveyed Saudi women had taken career breaks, only 40% of them later returned to work. Caregiving responsibilities were identified as the primary reason for career breaks among Saudi women. This indicates the impact of motherhood on the discontinuity of women's careers and the challenges women face in returning to the workforce after a motherhood-related break. While the existing studies on Saudi women's employment mainly focus on workforce participation and workplace inclusion (Aldossari et al. 2023, Sian et al., 2020), there is a lack of research to understand the experiences of professional women who attempt to return to the workforce after facing career discontinuity due to motherhood. We argue that it is important to understand the experience of the 'hidden talent' lying in stay-at-home mothers as without plugging this gap, the aim of Vision 2030 in inserting and retaining women in the KSA workforce would remain incomplete.

The study focuses on career-break decisions and return-to-work strategies among Saudi professional women. In this, it applies Anthony Giddens's (1984) theory of duality of structure to understand how the structures formed out of organisational and social practices influence women's agency concerning their career break and return experience. In this work-in-progress project, we aim to obtain qualitative data through in-depth semi-structured interviews from women professionals who have taken maternity-related breaks and have attempted to return to work. We will also interview the organisational representatives of companies that employ such women in both public and private sectors in Saudi. This is to further understand if the culture and policies in the two spheres have particular implications for women's careers. The data will be thematically analysed using NVivo.

This research contributes to understanding the evolving work-life dynamics for women professionals in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the context of motherhood. It also offers insights into policy measures and organisational interventions that may support women's career continuity to support Saudi Vision 2030.

(Im)Mobility & Migration – Room 3.212

Careering through Life? Charting Digital Nomad Careers over Their Life Course

Christopher Russell, Dimitrinka Stoyanova Russell

(Canterbury Christ Church University)

This paper sheds light on the careers of digital nomads. Digital nomadism, location-independent technology-enabled work, is a growing global phenomenon. Its importance lies not just in its spread and scope but also in its promise of freedom and fulfilment. It is therefore important to scrutinise and examine the realities and experiences of those working as digital nomads. Digital nomadism is also undergoing change. While pre-pandemic digital nomads were predominantly independent workers, post-pandemic employees can take advantage of evolving organisational policies (Bonneau et al., 2023) to join their ranks. This development warrants further exploration of how digital nomadism intersects with traditional employment structures. Usually researched through social media or in coworking spaces, our current knowledge is partial and fragmented. Emerging studies highlight the

complexity of digital nomadism, including the extensive meta-work required to maintain mobility and navigate institutional barriers (Aroles et al., 2023). However, from such snippets we don't know what the careers of these digital nomads look like over their life course as they career from one location to the next or return to more static lives. This is partly due to methodological limitations: digital nomads are, literally, a moving target.

Conducting fieldwork in Bansko, Bulgaria, a digital nomad hotspot and site of the world's largest digital nomad (physical) meeting place, Bansko Nomad Fest, we capture digital nomads' career (hi)stories and reflections longitudinally through multiple semi-structured interviews with each of 40 participants in the course of our two-year project that commenced in December 2024. The initial face-to-face interviews are biographical followed up by 'checking in', face-to-face or online, with the participants about developments in their careers and working lives. This paper shares initial findings from the first round of interviews and Nomad Fest in June 2025. We expect a more focused conceptual picture will emerge, based on existing theories which can be applied to the careers of digital nomads. Are they as boundaryless (Arthur, 1994, Arthur and Rosseau, 1996) as their cross-border travel suggests, or more protean (Hall, 2004) or mosaic (Morris et al., 2021)? To enhance this the approach of studying careers over the life course is adopted. Firstly, it examines career development in relation to key life transitions (Tomlinson et al., 2018). This is valuable because travel and relocation are decisions likely to be linked to the personal situation, and the priorities of the respective life stage, of a professional. Secondly, it situates transitions in institutional and organisational contexts, thus is sensitive to the changing or challenging national setting nomads may be experiencing and managing. It also brings in the various other actors which influence decisions and career moves: from significant others and family through social and cultural factors of location to wider national and transnational institutional and regulatory frameworks. Aptly, this shifts the focus away from the simplified idea of a free agent currently dominating digital nomad research. Digital nomadism has the potential to contribute to this literature on the multi-faceted reality of non-traditional and flexible careers through empirical insight and related career conceptualisation.

Experiences of EU Nationals in NI Post-Brexit: Employment, Mobility and Family Life

Emma Calvert, Elaine Moriarty, Cecilia Gialdini

(Queen's University Belfast)

The UK's exit from the European Union (EU) represents a pronounced discontinuity in terms of stability and security for some EU nationals, for example, with regards work and family life in the UK. The new regulatory environment includes the introduction of the EU Settlement Scheme in 2019 for EU nationals already living in the UK and the new points-based visa system for those arriving after 2021. These arrangements pose challenges for some EU nationals, not only in terms of their employment but also their experiences of mobility and family life.

The "Migrant and Employer Strategies Post-Brexit in an All-Island Economy" is a collaborative research project between Queen's University Belfast and Trinity College Dublin. It investigates the experiences, strategies and challenges faced by EU nationals in NI in response to these transformative changes. Drawing from analysis of data from an innovative qualitative panel study of almost 50 EU nationals living and working in Northern Ireland, this paper presents some of the preliminary findings of the lived experiences of EU nationals in a fast changing and transformed regulatory context.

"A Different Scale of Work": Displaced Ukrainian Workers in Czechia Navigating Rupture and Continuity through Remote Work

Ivana Lukes Rybanska, Petr Mezihorák, Karolina Kania, Marko Orel

(Prague University of Economics and Business)

This paper investigates how Ukrainian workers displaced by the full-scale Russian invasion (in February 2022) navigate the major life disruption and work continuity through remote work arrangements while residing in Czechia. Remote work, often associated with individual preferences for better work-life balance and increased productivity (Bellmann & Hübler, 2021; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022), presents in this case an enforced strategy for workers displaced by an exogenous shock. The investigation of remote work under such conditions contributes to the literature nuancing understanding of cross-border (remote) work (Nash et al., 2021; Sánchez-Vergara et al., 2023; Cook, 2023; Bucher et al., 2024) and (en/forced) migration (Alberti & Sacchetto, 2024; Refai et al., 2024).

The research examines a fundamental tension: while workers often prefer remote arrangements to maintain employment continuity across borders, employers typically desire in-person work for traditional oversight and control. These contradictions play out against the backdrop of forced migration—a rather profound life discontinuity—where remote work paradoxically allows certain professional continuity (i.e., working for original employers, maintaining sector expertise). The analysis contributes to a critical examination of remote work as a promoted resilience strategy for enforced migrants, highlighting previously understudied ambiguous consequences of this arrangement.

Data collection (in progress) consists of semi-structured interviews with approximately 40 remote workers and up to 10 stakeholders, complemented by ethnographic fieldwork (capturing nuances of physical workspace arrangements, technological adaptations, and embodied practices that interviews alone cannot reveal). Czechia provides a relevant context for this study due to its high ratio of forced migrants per capita and the historical pattern of Ukrainian migrants accessing primarily low-skilled employment within the country (Stojanov et al., 2022; Kosyakova et al., 2024) . This context enables examination of whether remote work helps workers resist the deskilling typically experienced by migrants in the Czech labour market.

Labour process theory together with social reproduction perspective (Thompson & Smith, 2000; Baglioni & Mezzadri, 2020; Baglioni, 2024) will serve as the main theoretical framework to reveal how respondents reconfigure both work and reproductive practices in response to remote work arrangement. Preliminary findings show that a seemingly straightforward transition to digital spaces involves complex reconfigurations of labour processes and life circumstances. For instance, the workers are adjusting their professional profiles to more individualized conditions, narrowing their focus within labour processes, reducing working hours to manage mental health issues, and establishing firmer boundaries between work and non-work. This paper documents how digital work arrangements simultaneously enable and complicate responses to forced migration, while demonstrating workers' active agency in reconstructing their professional lives amid significant disruption. This research expands understanding of remote work   by examining how crisis-driven implementation transforms both the practice and meaning of digital labour arrangements across national boundaries.

(In)Decent Work & Employment 1 – Room 2.217

Biographical Dispositions, Ideal Worker Norms, and the Paradox of Meaningful Work in Care

Knut Laaser, Valeria Pulignano

(King's College London)

There is a paradox in the Meaningful Work (MW) scholarship: while meaningfulness is a subjective assessment, it is also grounded in an external, objective context that shapes and legitimizes what may be considered meaningful by individuals. This paradox, often referred to as the 'job satisfaction paradox' in the sociology of work and employment research, highlights a disconnection between reported job satisfaction and objective job quality (Brown et al., 2012). Employees in occupations demanding routine skills, offering little task discretion, modest career opportunities, and low pay—such as care work—often report their jobs as highly meaningful (Laaser and Bolton, 2022). While MW research from management and organizational behavior perspectives emphasizes the episodic and ongoing struggles of individuals to find worth in their work, this research offers a different position. We argue that experiences of employment and job characteristics are shaped not only by life course and family situations (Belardi et al., 2022) but also by acquired dispositions, which can lead workers to perceive poorly paid and undervalued jobs as meaningful. Drawing on 39 biographical interviews with care workers in Germany and the UK, the presentation discusses how biographical norms influence workers' understanding of meaningful work.

Against this backdrop and while acknowledging the importance of social context in shaping MW as a subjective, organizational, and collective good, we argue for a conceptualization that moves beyond daily discursive struggles (Bailey et al., 2024) and social cues (Lysova et al., 2024). Employing the concepts of the 'ideal worker norm' (Williams et al., 2013), 'stigmatisation' (Goffman, 1963), and the politics of MW approach (Laaser and Karlsson, 2023), we link the experience of MW dimensions—such

as recognition, worthwhile contributions, self-transcendence, and belonging—to a 'biographically induced' ideal worker norm. This conceptualization positions caring for and about others as central to how MW is experienced in care work. Including care workers from both countries broadens the range of social contexts examined, thereby strengthening the theoretical robustness of our findings.

The Narrative Unity of Meaningful Work

Sally Wightman

(Northumbria University)

The concept of meaningful work (MFW) continues to attract attention among management scholars (Bailey, Madden, & Lips-Wiersma, 2024). Researchers have been interested in a number of areas within the field such as how we conceptualise MFW (Michaelson, 2019), the outcomes of MFW (Allan, Batz-Barbarich, Sterling, & Tay, 2019), and the role of organisations in the provision of MFW (Lysova, Allan, Dik, Duffy, & Steger, 2019). A limited number of studies have considered the relationship between narratives, time, and MFW, with Bailey and Madden (2017) suggesting that peak meaningfulness occurs when the work connects the past, present and future, and Fletcher and Schofield (2021) claiming that meaningfulness rests on the significance of the moment in relation to a wider timescale.

This paper aims to further understanding of the role of narratives in the experience of MFW by drawing on accounts from employees working for Christian and secular youth homelessness charities in the UK, along with the work of neo-Aristotelian, Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre has had a significant impact on business ethics and organisational studies more broadly, not to mention several other fields outside of moral philosophy (Beadle & Moore, 2020). MacIntyre is a dominant voice in the debates around narrative identity (Watson, 2009), and narrativity is a key thread that runs consistently throughout his work. It is evident in his style of writing, his views on moral enquiry, and not least through his threefold account of the virtues which comprises of the ideas of practices, traditions, and the narrative unity of a human life (MacIntyre, 2007). These three concepts are central to this paper.

The paper suggests that the workers whose sense of meaningfulness derived from a direct connection between the purpose of their work or ethos of the organisation and components of their wider narrative identity (which in this case is understood as the practices, traditions, and significant events in their life histories which informed their decision to join the organisation) possessed a stronger, longer-lasting sense of meaningfulness than others. Because their sense of meaning preceded – both temporally and affectively - their joining their organisation, they seemed less dependent upon their employer for meaning. This provided them with resources to withstand sometimes severe workplace and client-based challenges, and as a result they expressed little intention to leave the organisation, or at least the line of work. In contrast, those with an indirect narrative connection seemed to place greater emphasis on organisational features such as pay and work-life balance. Many of these workers joined their organisation for these reasons and expressed that they would leave for more favourable provisions, or to pursue other passions.

A Cut above the Rest? Quality of Working Life in Small Hair Salons

Lisa Chamberlain, Emma Hughes, Rory Donnelly, Caroline Gattrell

(University of Glasgow)

70% of worldwide employment occurs within micro and small enterprises (MSEs), yet we continue to know relatively little about the dynamics of socio-economic relationships and quality of working life in these organisations. Previous research has shown that work and employment practices within MSEs are often defined by proximal and personal interactions rather than formal organisational procedures (Harney et al., 2022), but tends to focus on standard employment relationships (SERs) despite the prevalence of non-standard employment across the labour market. Therefore, efforts to understand and promote "good work" in the face of widespread economic and political uncertainty must include both non-standard employment structures and the realities of work within MSEs. To begin to address this gap, we apply Quality of Working Life (QWL) theory to the analysis of the work and employment experiences of people working in small hair salons. Hair salons are an illuminating setting for this research because they contain a variety of employment relationships, including SERs, self-employment in a salon owned by someone else (chair renting), and self-employment in a self-owned salon or as a mobile service provider. QWL as a conceptualisation of good work offers a pluralistic perspective on

work experiences, arguing that work meeting key criteria (e.g., adequate and fair compensation, constitutionalism, and individual proactivity) can benefit both workers and organisations (Grote and Guest, 2017). Multi-modal qualitative data was collected through field observations (n = 36 hours) and in-depth photo-elicitation interviews (n = 37 interviews) with salon owner-managers and hairstylists in England. The thematic analysis of the data advances QWL research by revealing how macro-level professional and legal norms interact with meso-level socio-economic relationships to shape traditional and non-standard employment arrangements and QWL. We move beyond the current focus on SERs and show how a complex nexus of socio-economic relationships with clients, peers, and owner-managers shape experiences of QWL for personal service workers in small businesses. Our findings offer three theoretical contributions. First, we extend the evidence base for the QWL framework by showing where the normative model aligns with and overlooks the features of work that are most relevant to hairdressers' lived experiences. Second, we show how micro-level personal interactions and macro-level cultural and professional norms shaped meso-level work and employment practices. Third, we highlight tensions among professional, social, and legal obligations between self-employed "chair renters" and the owner-managers of the salons they work within. Based on our findings, we reconceptualise and extend QWL theory to account for non-standard employment relationships and multi-level influences. We demonstrate that QWL's utility as an emancipatory framework to address urgent challenges to the provision of good work can and should be extended to MSEs, and offer recommendations for policy and practice.

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Health, Sickness and the Organisation of Work and Employment for Those Who Work at Sea

Helen Devereux

(Solent University)

This paper explores occupational ill health among seafarers employed onboard UK registered ships. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with seafarers and occupational health and safety practitioners who oversee the health and safety of those employed at sea. Seafarers highlighted numerous ways in which the organisation of their work and employment both adversely impacted on their health and discouraged the reporting of occupational ill health. These included fatigue from excessive working hours and a lack of health surveillance which was considered to be a consequence of precarious employment. Whilst the OSH practitioners expressed some similar thoughts to the seafarers around the likely causes of work-related ill health, there were indications of a general lack of awareness of the severity of key issues. Moreover, it was apparent that the OSH practitioners focussed on occupational ill health primarily in terms of absence management. This was notably different to their approach to occupational safety, for which knowledge of injury data and examples of interventions were readily provided. The paper, therefore, raises questions about the disparities between the occupational ill health and occupational safety for those who work at sea. It concludes that far greater attention must be paid to the organisation of work and employment in order to improve the health outcomes of those who work at sea.

(In)Decent Work & Employment 2 – Room 2.218

Home Care in Ireland: Pathways to Precarious, Low-Paid Work, (In)Decent Work

Aine Ni Leime, Maeve O Sullivan

(University of Galway)

This paper investigates Home Care Assistants' pathways to (in)decent work in the home care sector in Ireland. It also analyses their reported experiences of work, focusing on job quality, precarity and tensions between the varying employment practices of for-profit companies, NGOs and co-operatives and carers' efforts to provide good care. It draws on data from a study funded by the Low Pay Commission in Ireland. The home-care sector delivers a range of home-care services for older people, dependent adults and children. This growing sector, dominated by older females and migrants is facing a crisis in terms of attraction and retention of staff. There is also increasing concern regarding workforce well-being because of work intensification, lack of work-life balance, precarity, low pay and lack of worker voice (Ní Léime et al, 2019, O'Neill et al, 2023)

Previous international and national research focuses on the poor working conditions, low pay and precarious forms of employment experienced by home care workers (Duffy, 2005, Behtoui et al, 2017, Ní Léime and Street, 2019). Some research focuses on specific cohorts of workers such as migrant care workers (Doyle and Timonen, 2009, Cangiano and Walsh, 2014). Other studies focus on the vocational nature of the role and the increasingly intensive time pressures care workers are faced with by employers and by neo-liberal government policies (Duffy et al, 2015, Ní Léime et al, 2019). There has been little investigation into how workers come to occupy the role of Health Care Assistant and into what practices might provide decent conditions of employment that may decrease the turnover of employees in the sector reducing discontinuities both in workers' earnings and in care provision for clients.

In this study, a two pronged approach is adopted. First a political economy of ageing approach is used to analyse the context of relevant government and employer policy and practice. Second, a lifecourse approach to data collection and analysis is adopted. Data from interviews conducted with 20 home health care workers in 2024-25, employed by a variety of employers is analysed, providing insights into the pathways people follow into working as health care assistants. Their reported experiences of working in these roles are analysed as are data from interviews with five managers/employers/senior health service officials to investigate home care work policy and practice.

Findings include that despite carrying out highly responsible and sometimes physically and emotionally demanding work, carers are typically low paid and experience precarious working hours resulting in discontinuities of earnings for workers and in care for vulnerable clients. This varies across employer types (state, NGO, for-profit and co-operatives).

This paper contributes to existing research by enhancing our understanding of the worklife trajectories that lead Home Care Assistants to work in this sector in (usually) low paid and precarious jobs, by using a lifecourse analysis. Analysis of workers' reported lived experiences and suggestions for change as well as of employer and policy experts' perspectives are used as a basis for providing government and employer policy and practice recommendations.

Do Reductions in Paid Employment Mediate the Effect of Health Shocks on Informal Care Work? Evidence from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing

David Candon

(Nottingham Trent University)

As the population continues to age, an increasing number of older individuals combine their formal paid employment with informal caring responsibilities. A potential impediment to both of these activities is the risk of a sudden, serious reduction in the person's health. Events such as a heart attack, stroke, or cancer diagnoses, commonly known as health shocks, may restrict a person's ability to perform caring tasks because of a newly acquired disability, and their time to perform these activities while they recover. However, a simple estimation of the effect of a health shock on informal care provision might give misleading results. On the one hand, we may expect to see people who suffer health shocks to reduce their time spent caring since they now need to spend more time resting and recuperating. On the other hand, it is important to note that informal care differs from formal labour market activity in that people may have an emotional connection to the role and may find it difficult to stop providing it. Instead, they may decide to reduce their labour supply and substitute time in paid employment for time spent providing informal care. In this case, we may find that people who suffer health shocks demonstrate no reduction in ability to perform informal care because any negative effect from the health shock was subsumed by the reduction in labour supply. Because of the mediating nature of paid employment, naïve analysis would not illuminate this relationship.

Using data from the English Longitudinal of Ageing, I create a mediation model where paid employment acts as a mediator variable between health shocks and informal care provision. The total effect of health shocks on informal care can then be decomposed into the sum of the direct effect of the health shock on informal care and the indirect effect of the health shock on informal care. The indirect effect is the product of the direct effect of the health shock on employment and the direct effect of employment on informal care provision. I find that respondents who suffer a health shock reduce their hours of care, are less likely to report caring in the last week, and are less likely to care for someone who is long term sick/disabled. However, in all cases the direct effect of heath shock is greater in magnitude than the total effect of the health shock on caring. This is due to respondents who suffer health shocks being less likely to work, which increases the probability of caring. Depending on the measure used, working accounts for between 16-29% of the overall effect.

From a policy perspective, this work is important since it demonstrates that informal carers who suffer health shocks may still be struggling with their role, even though they report that they are doing similar hours to before the health shock. This can allow for respite services, or home help for the care recipient, to be targeted towards caring tasks that the carer may now struggle with because of the shock.

Care Leave Employment Policy in the Cultural and Creative Industries: Anything BUT Care

Tamsyn Dent, Sara De Benedictis, Natalie Wreyford

(King's College London, Brunel University London)

In 2013 David Hesmondhalgh wrote of the "patterns of change AND continuity that have defined the cultural and creative industries since the 1970s. One aspect of continuity within creative and cultural labour markets is the continued barriers to employment and progression faced by women (Gill 2015; Wreyford 2015; Brook et al., 2020). Whilst women enter the multiple sectors associated with this labour market in equal numbers to men and outnumber men in subject-specific education courses, they do not proceed to positions of either managerial or creative leadership with many leaving the industry at a certain point in their career trajectory (Dent 2019). That point corresponds with the ages commonly associated with childbirth and the raising of young children, a trend vastly acerbated by the Covid-19 crisis (Wreyford et al., 2023) reinforcing the ever-dominant assumption that women bear the brunt of childcare and caring responsibilities.

But women's entry to the labour market is not a recent phenomenon. There have been several legislative changes since the 1970s designed to support those with caring responsibilities in the workplace. This framework of what constitutes 'care' has also evolved, recognising the multiple acts of human care beyond childcare. How that legislation has been understood and communicated by cultural and creative institutions reveals a stark misinterpretation of care leave support for its workforce.

The data that informs this article is drawn from a mapping exercise of care leave provision offered at UK-based creative and cultural institutions across three sectors: film & television, museums and galleries and fashion. Institutions were identified through the 'Financial Analysis Made Easy' (FAME) database and comprised of UK institutions with over 50 employees. The mapping searched for care leave policies discernible from publicly available information including websites, job advertisements and recruitment webpages. It considered both what and how care policy is communicated. Over 180 organisations were mapped with disturbing results. Critically few organisations disclosed detailed information on care leave policy. If care was mentioned, it was normatively referenced under terms such as 'family-friendly benefits' with no clear distinction made on what forms for care leave support were offered beyond the statutory requirement. In contrast, the mapped organisations provided a wealth of information of other employee benefits, including social activities, support for transport costs as well as employee subsistence related to wellbeing and mental health.

As we argue, wellbeing is not the same as care. Using a feminist of care ethical framing (Tronto 2013) the paper illustrates the complexity of care leave employment provision within the UK and the variable, inconsistent communication of such provision to its prospective workforce. In addition, we highlight the few cases of good practice, organisations which provide clear, transparent information of what forms of care leave provision are granted. Our hope is to establish a benchmark against which all companies and organisations can refer to, one that recognises the multiple forms of care labour that humans are subject to and clear communication of how that need to provide care is recognised in the workplace.

Understanding Community Health Worker Experiences in India: A Study of Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) Workers in Bihar, India

Riya Chaudhary

(University of Leeds)

This paper explores the experiences of Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers in Bihar, India, specifically the factors influencing their decision to join the workforce and how their experiences differ across diverse social contexts. Moreover, I also aim to examine how gender, class, and geographical location intersect to create varied experiences among ASHA workers. The study will particularly examine how these workers navigate labour market constraints, the gendered nature of work, and the structural limitations of India's public health system. ASHA workers are categorised as Community Health Workers (CHWs) who play a crucial role in bridging the gap between communities and healthcare systems, particularly in low- and middle income countries (LMICs) such as India. India has 1 million all-women ASHAs in position, making it the world's most extensive community volunteer programme. Despite their essential role in maternal care, vaccination, family planning, and disease prevention, ASHA workers remain classified as "honorary volunteers" and receive only a performance-based honorarium rather than wages, leaving them outside the purview of key labour protections. I draw on Baldock's (1998) framework, which says that volunteering operates between private and public domains, particularly in relation to its links with systems such as the family, the state, and the economy. While Baldock's (1998) framework can help us connect domestic roles, and paid labour market, with individual choices to understand women's participation in the voluntary work, framing it as unpaid labour, it often overlooks other forms of voluntary work, such as lowwage voluntary labour, which is particularly relevant to ASHA workers. This is important because when understanding the specific choices of women, it is essential to understand whether this low-wage voluntary work is a matter of choice or coercion. In my conceptual framework, I also examine care work and the feminisation of labour, which provide insight into how care work and those who perform it are perceived, particularly within the broader context of its devaluation and the precarious nature of such employment. Existing literature also often frames ASHA workers' motivations in binary terms—either as driven by love or money—the study aims to move beyond this dichotomy. Instead, it situates their participation within the broader social, economic, and political structures that shape their work experiences.

I will draw on data collected for my PhD, from ASHA workers in Bihar, India between January and May 2025. I conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 ASHA workers in rural and 8 ASHA workers in urban areas along with the participant observation of ASHA workers in the field.

This study will contribute to the broader discourse on the voluntary work and care work by situating these concepts within localised social contexts and relationships. Thus, this approach helps us understand how care operates socially and politically, offering insights into the diverse social realities of women's lives beyond Western context. Using a feminist research paradigm, this research gives voice to the marginalised women who are often silenced and oppressed. By doing so, the research gives in-depth understanding of precarious forms of work in the Global South.

Labour Agency, Trade Unions & Social Movements – Room 3.211

Racial Capitalism and Working Class Resistance: Private Hire Drivers' Struggles in the Platform Gig Economy

Joe Kearsey

(University of Nottingham)

In much of the literature which focuses on app-based cab work in the platform gig economy, the issues of racial bias and discrimination (Vallas and Schor, 2020; Rosenblat, 2018) racialised hierarchy (Hua and Ray, 2018), as well as racial divisions (Vallas, 2018) have been variously addressed. Yet fewer studies have focused on theoretically and empirically interrogating the role of racism as a material structuring force in the emergence and organisation of app-based cab work. While there is an emergent field of research which has highlighted the central role of racialisation and racial division within the UK

taxi and private hire industry (Aslam and Woodcock, 2020; Gebrial, 2022), the precise manner in which these processes have shaped the materiality of drivers' day to day struggles, and therefore the historically determined terrain upon which new and emergent forms of organisation have emerged, requires further investigation.

This paper explores how app-based private hire drivers' relation to capital, the labour process, and their position within society more generally, has influenced the forms of resistance and collective organisation they have adopted. The research has taken the form of a participatory ethnographic case study among workers within the United Private Hire Drivers branch of the Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain, developing a class composition analysis in order to investigate the material conditions through which working class struggles arise. This approach has necessitated engaging with the role that the racialised differentiation and the hierarchical (re)ordering of the working class has played in the development and organisation of capitalism (Robinson, 2020; Virdee, 2019), in order to critically contribute to an emergent field of work focusing on platform workers' collective organisation and resistance (Cini and Goldmann, 202; Tassinari and Maccarrone, 2020). As such, the research highlights the longstanding racial divisions in London's taxi and private hire industry, illustrating the manner in which platforms have entered the sector, making use of new digital technologies to exploit and extend this differentiation. It explores how historically specific forms of racism and racialisation have served to structure the material conditions and organisation of app-based private hire work in the UK and in turn, inform workers resistance and collective struggle on that basis. The research therefore critically engages with current studies on both racialisation and racism in the platform gig economy, as well as emergent app-based worker resistance and collective organisation, by emphasising the role and centrality of working class struggle and resistance to racial capitalism. Accordingly, the particular form of anti-racist organisation adopted by private hire drivers within their self-organised associations and independent unions in recent years, can be understood as essential to challenging their exploitation in the platform gig economy.

From Coping to Contestation and Back Again? The Situated Agency of Platform Workers in Buenos Aires and Manchester

Mathew Johnson, Angel Martin-Caballero, Eva Herman

(University of Manchester)

A growing body of international research has documented various forms of collective action and resistance among segments of the platform economy around the world (e.g., Popan, 2021; Umney et al., 2024; Atzeni, 2022; Cant and Woodcock, 2020; Martindale et al., 2024; Wood et al., 2019). And while there is clear evidence of solidarity and bottom-up mobilisation among an atomised workforce (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2021; Joyce et al., 2023), there is also a need to explore more quotidian and subtle forms of coping, mutual aid, and misbehaviour, among diverse groups of platform workers (Ford & Honan, 2019; Hau & Borello, 2023).

This research aims to provide a context sensitive account of platform workers' 'situated agency' and the interplay between individual and collective responses to the many grievances generated by the labour process of platform ride hailing (Gandini, 2019). We revisit Lister's (2001) model of agency among young people living in poverty which distinguishes between broad strategies of coping (or 'getting by') and contestation (or 'getting back at'). We apply this to 40 interviews with platform ride-hailing drivers in Buenos Aires and Greater Manchester.

Our analysis reveals that, in order to cope with the realities of platform work, drivers are often actively engaged in communities of mutual aid that provide advice, support and solidarity around both work and non-work issues. In turn, these dense social networks can also provide the basis for mobilisations against platforms and regulators, while also drawing wider public attention to problems of low pay and long hours. In the spaces between episodes of collective unrest, we see numerous forms of individual coping strategies such as extending shifts, working additional days, and multi-apping in order to meet household income goals. Some drivers also work 'off-the clock' and actively avoid local regulators by deploying various regulatory circumvention and 'algorithmic gaming' tactics.

We argue that rather than trying to fit varied examples of worker agency into distinct categories, we should look at the dynamic and potentially contradictory interactions between them. For example, workers often talk of the need to act collectively in order to build pressure on platforms, while at the same time still pursuing their own individual income maximisation strategies. Similarly, workers also

claim to value the 'freedom' and 'flexibility' of platform work, but the longer they work on platforms the more 'sunk costs' they accrue as a result of maintaining a vehicle, renewing their license, and building up platform specific ratings, all of which make it harder to 'exit'. Ultimately, in the search for solidarity, collectivism, and worker power we should neither overlook, nor overstate, everyday coping strategies, mutual aid, and misbehaviour. A more nuanced view of worker agency recognises how workers simultaneously capture and concede control of the labour process, while also grappling with the wider system of market and social relations within which platform work is embedded.

Temporalities of Labour Agency in Australia's Gig Economy

Tom Barratt

(University of Western Australia)

This paper expands discourse on temporality and labour agency for workers in the gig economy by understanding the 'timescales' at which agency is expressed. Positioned in relation to debates around constrained agency in labour geography (Coe & Jordhus-Lier, 2011), the paper looks at the temporality of agency and how it is wielded by individual workers with limited and varying market power (Barratt et al., 2020). In doing so paper examines the agentic potential of gig workers across the gig economy by differentiating between food delivery couriers, rideshare drivers and those who work on platform mediated marketplaces. Drawing on data generated as part of a three year, Australian Research Council DECRA Fellowship, this qualitative paper explores how agency is expressed both in relation to time and over time, often at the level of 'resilience' (Katz, 2004). In doing so it builds upon recent developments around thick time (Bose, 2024), and the structural constraints placed on labour by social, political and market conditions (e.g. Sun et al., 2025), and helps close the temporal gap identified in recent empirical (Bose, 2024; Gupta, 2023) and review articles (Strauss, 2018; Coe & Jordhus-Lier, 2023)

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From the Streets to the Shops: Platform Resistance among Delivery Workers and Small Business Owners in South Korea

Seonok Lee

(University of Groningen)

This paper explores the emergence of platform resistance among delivery workers and small business owners in South Korea, focusing on how they resist the hyper-exploitative practices of platform capitalism. Platform companies, operating globally but impacting workers locally, have redefined employment relationships through algorithmic management, self-employment classifications, and legal

ambiguity. These dynamics have rendered much of platform labour invisible and precarious—especially for young adults and migrant workers who dominate the sector (van Doorn, 2021).

The study highlights the formation of cross-class solidarity between delivery rider unions, small business owners, and civic advocacy groups—an alliance that remains relatively rare in the gig economy. While small business owners are often positioned as part of capital, their increasing reliance on platform infrastructure and exposure to algorithmic control has eroded their autonomy and income security. Their participation in this collective struggle reflects the growing precaritisation of traditionally "independent" actors and the blurring of boundaries between labour and capital.

Drawing on semi-structured interviews with unionised delivery workers, small business representatives, and civil society actors, as well as autoethnographic insights from the researcher's own experience as a delivery worker, the study examines how new forms of platform resistance are being realised from the ground up.

The findings reveal the emergence of what can be called a "platform working class" in the making—one that is digitally mediated, legally marginal, and transnationally embedded. In South Korea, delivery workers have developed innovative organising strategies that combine traditional union practices with platform-specific tactics, leveraging digital tools and social media while navigating the legal liminality of platform labour (Chun, 2019). Small business owners, similarly subject to algorithmic governance and precarious conditions, have joined these efforts, further challenging the dominant platform narrative that positions companies as neutral facilitators rather than employers (Gillespie, 2010)—a strategy that strategically obscures the exploitative labour relations underpinning gig work.

Theoretically, the paper draws on critical platform studies and the sociology of work to interrogate how platform labour resistance is shaped by intersectional vulnerabilities—youth, migrant status, legal exclusion—and yet gives rise to new solidaristic practices. It also contributes to broader debates on the future of work by examining how traditional labour institutions adapt (or struggle to adapt) to the fragmented and individualised realities of the gig economy (Kaine & Josserand, 2019).

This research contributes to the conference theme of "Labour agency, trade unions, and social movements" by offering empirical insights into how workers and allies mobilise across class, legal, and organisational boundaries. It shows that even under conditions of algorithmic control and legal uncertainty, cross-class collective action is not only possible but actively emerging. By situating these developments within the wider context of global platform capitalism, the paper highlights the shifting terrain of labour struggles today.

Open Stream – Room 2.219
Special Event

Interrogating the 'Student Worker': Experiences, Patterns and the Political Economy of 'Earning While Learning'

Kim Allen, Chavan Kissoon, Agnieszka Rydzik, Abigail Ehidiamen, Rajesh Nautiyal, Mark Wilding, Adrian Wright, Mary Lawler, Dorota Marsh, Rachel Cohen, Kirsty Finn, Kate Hardy, Lilith Brouwers, Mia Zhong, Cassie Kill

(University of Leeds, University of Lincoln, University of Lancashire, City, University of London, University of Leeds, University of Sheffield)

Most school and college students have experience of paid work (Hobbs et al. 2006; McCoy and Smyth 2007; Raby et al. 2018) and cross-national studies, such as the EUROSTUDENT project, show that on average 59% of university students are in paid employment (Gwosc et al. 2021). This is partly driven by labour market fragmentation and the growing demand for cheap part-time labour (Mizen, Bolton, and Pole 1999), as well as the rising cost of living and neoliberal funding reforms to post-compulsory education (Perna and Odle 2020). 'Employability' agendas within education also encourage the accumulation of work 'experience' to improve future employment outcomes (Jones, Mann, and Morris 2016; Holdsworth 2017). Meanwhile, 'work-based learning' is mandatory on vocational programmes, apprenticeships, or nursing or social work degrees (Oke et al. 2023). Work – both paid and unpaid -

therefore plays an integral and growing role in the lives of many students, and these diverse encounters with work provide the earliest socialisation into workplace norms and expectations for most young people (Rydzik and Kissoon 2022). Work undertaken by students also makes a major economic contribution, with students comprising a significant proportion of workers in some sectors such as hospitality, retail and care work (Rydzik and Bal 2023; Wright et al 2024; Zhong et al, forthcoming).

Despite their numerical and social importance however, student workers have been under-examined in sociological literature on work and employment; a marginal status reproduced by employers and policymakers and institutionalized through age-based Minimum Wage legislation in some countries. Framed as 'proto workers' (Hardy et al., forthcoming), whose working lives are incidental or secondary to their present education or future working careers, student workers are often highly exploited, poorly paid and penalised for their dual status as workers and learners (Sukarieh and Tannock 2017; Lucas 1997). Studies show that, while supporting students' financial needs and serving other social functions, engaging in paid work while studying can exacerbate existing insecurities and inequalities among young people (Besen-Cassino 2008; Hordósy, Clark, and Vickers 2018; Rydzik and Bal 2023). Meanwhile, international students experience circuits of labour-and-learning mobility, whereby visa regimes shape (interdependent) educational and working patterns and opportunities (Maury 2020). The varied ways that different groups of students' engage in paid work, and how this impacts their present lives, educational studies and future work trajectories, is ripe for further exploration.

This Special Event will bring together three different research projects focused on student workers in England. Together, the the three presentations will explore the varied experiences of working students across different age groups and educational phases, labour market sectors, geographical contexts and social axes including gender, race, class and domicile. Intended to redress the invisibility and marginalisation of student workers within the Sociology of Work and Employment, this Special Event will begin to set an agenda for future conceptual and empirical interrogations of the relationship between earning and learning.

The event will also provide a forum to promote an upcoming Special Issue of WES on 'Earning while Learning'.

Conceptualising International Student Workers' Agentic Responses within the Hostile Environment of the UK Labour Market

Chavan Kissoon, Agnieszka Rydzik, Abigail Ehidiamen, Rajesh Nautiyal,

(University of Leeds, University of Lincoln)

In the post-Brexit, post-Covid and post-austerity UK economy characterised by severe labour shortages in key sectors such as social care and hospitality, international students fulfil an important – albeit under-appreciated – societal role, especially in peripheral UK areas and struggling UK sectors. Yet, international students have, in recent years, become one of the most scapegoated migrant groups in the UK, with politicians making and maintaining the political decisions of including this group in migration statistics and further tightening visa restrictions.

While much research focuses on the educational experiences of international students, this study seeks to understand international students' experiences of searching for work and staying in part-time employment, a dimension that is often marginalised and left under-explored. In particular, it focuses on the ways in which international students learn about, make sense of and adapt to the UK jobs market and the norms of UK society, and how they deploy their agency strategically and tactically to build a life in the UK within the limitations imposed on them legally (i.e. 20 hours a week working limit) and societally.

Drawing on 21 semi-structured interviews with international students of West African and South Asian heritage studying full-time in the UK higher education system and working part-time, this paper discusses the diverse range of agentic responses adopted by international student workers. It provides a new conceptualisation of the distinctive and context-specific ways in which South Asian and West African international students navigate the UK employment market and UK job sectors characterised by exploitative and racialised workplace experiences. In particular, the paper provides new knowledge and theoretical insight into the agentic ways in which international working students make sense of and manage their complex labour force positions in the hostile environment of 2020s UK.

Exacerbating Inequality: The Importance of Job Quality for Working Students

Mark Wilding, Adrian Wright, Mary Lawler, Dorota Marsh

(University of Lancashire)

The failure of maintenance loans to keep pace with inflation, alongside the cost-of-living crisis, means many students are left with little choice but to undertake paid work to make ends meet. Facing an unfavourable labour market, with opportunities further restricted for part-time work, many students engage in jobs which despite having high social value have low pay and poor-quality working conditions. While there are more than one million student workers in the UK, academic understanding of student work remains underdeveloped beyond a focus on financial hardship and long-working hours. We seek to bring student jobs into quality of work debates to acknowledge students' role as workers and improve understanding of how measures included in the good work framework impact upon student working lives. In examining these issues, we take the view that a variegated perspective of students and their jobs is necessary due to the diverse pressures and restrictions experienced by various student demographics (i.e., social class, gender and domicile), and use this as a starting point to understand how job quality exacerbates existing social and educational inequalities. Therefore, we ask: what is the quality of work that students experience while studying, how does this differ among student demographics, and what are the impacts in the workplace, university, and beyond?

The study is based on mixed-methods, including 26 semi-structured interviews with students engaged in paid work, and a university-wide survey of students (n493). The findings include alienation, lack of autonomy, limited voice, isolation, and work intensification. There is considerable variation in the findings according to student demographics, which suggest that student work not only reflects inequality in the workplace but also reinforces wider structural inequalities. By bringing student jobs into the quality of work conversation, we support the recognition of students' role as workers and improve understanding of their experiences and the impact of job quality, before making recommendations for targeted improvements to support working students.

"Student workers are workers": Reconceptualising Labour Market Entry and Youth Transitions

Kim Allen, Rachel Cohen, Kirsty Finn, Kate Hardy, Lilith Brouwers, Mia Zhong, Cassie Kill

(University of Leeds, City, University of London, University of Leeds, University of Sheffield)

Workers who are selling their labour while studying ('Earning while Learning' - or EwL) are marginalised in the labour market and this has been – to date – reflected in the sociology of work and youth. Conceptually, 'labour market entry' has been theorised as occurring following the end of formal education, when young people are understood to officially transition from education and into the labour market as 'school leavers' or 'graduates'. Such conceptualisations, at best, locate the paid work undertaken by students as incidental and marginal, with insufficient attention paid to the concurrent nature of earning and learning for many young people. Moreover, (young) age is the only social demographic for which there is a legal exception to equality and for which it is acceptable to provide lower rates of pay (institutionalised in Minimum Wage legislation), a social fact which is rarely heavily criticised in public discourse nor to a sustained degree with critical social studies of work and employment. In contrast, we argue that labour market entry begins considerably earlier and therefore these early experiences of work, particularly among young people while still in education, require more serious investigation and understanding. The presentation therefore asks: 'When student work is taken seriously as work – and student workers are reconceptualised as 'workers' - what comes into view empirically, conceptually and for policy? To address this, we draw on findings from a major ESRC-funded mixed-methods study in England exploring young women's earliest experiences of work (http://www.ywworking.co.uk), including analysis of national data sets (including the Labour Force Survey) and focus group interviews with 83 young women students (aged 14-23) in schools, colleges and universities about their experiences of EwL.

Work/place Alienation, Voice & Participation – Room 2.220

Surviving among Sharks: Investment Bankers' Adaptations to Extreme Work Alienation

Francois Schoenberger

(University of Oxford)

Despite their privileged status and considerable remuneration, investment bankers experience extreme work alienation, routinely working in excess of 80 hours per week (Ho 2009) and frequently suffering significant consequences for their physical and mental health. While existing scholarship has demonstrated that alienation is pervasive among elite workers, with research suggesting that individuals in such roles typically respond by disengaging (Yavaş 2024), investment bankers often do not exit as a response to alienation. Rather, many enter the profession with prior awareness that their tenure will be brief, conceptualising the role as a transitional phase towards future opportunities and a means of accumulating symbolic capital through affiliation with prestigious institutions (Bidwell et al. 2015). This study investigates how investment bankers navigate these harmful working conditions, drawing upon 77 in-depth interviews. The analysis identifies three principal modes of adaptation: firstly, collective adaptation through a culture of solidarity among peers; secondly, individual strategies aimed at carving out circumscribed spaces of autonomy within the constraints of the role; and thirdly, subjective coping mechanisms that minimise the severity of their experiences. This research makes two contributions to the sociology of work. It highlights a novel form of consent through temporary compliance, where work alienation is endured and accepted, but only for a predefined period. Additionally, it reintroduces structural labour constraints (particularly the availability of career alternatives) into analyses of worker compliance, challenging explanations that centre exclusively on individual agency.

The Basis of Workplace Alienation, Dissatisfaction and Unfulfilment: Examining Proximity Theory in the Context of Academic Working Life

Linda Evans

(University of Manchester)

This paper's contextual focus is the education workplace and workforce(s), but the findings presented will resonate with and have wider implications for other sectoral contexts.

The issue being investigated is what has been referred to as 'pressured professionalism' (Noordegraaf, 2007; Evans, 2018), whereby individuals feel overwhelmed by the scale, width or intensity of their work situations, and, as a result, feel anxious, stressed, and unfulfilled because they are pulled in too many directions.

The project – now completed - whose findings are discussed comprised four related studies of university professors' perspectives on their work as senior academics expected to provide leadership, and of non-professorial academics' perceptions of and perspectives on the professors with whom they work(ed) or encountered in their disciplinary communities. In total, data were gathered from more than 2000 questionnaire respondents and almost 100 interviewees. Research participants reported feeling pressured to perform, with many feeling that they fall short of what they should be achieving. One questionnaire respondent, for example, complained that 'professors have to be all-singing, all-dancing', another, that professors 'have to be all things to all people'. An interviewee said 'we can only really deliver mediocre stuff because we simply don't have the capacity to deliver at the levels expected'.

To draw out the wider implications of workplace dissatisfaction or lack of fulfilment through 'pressured professionalism', Evans's (2018) 'proximity theory' will be presented. Explaining the bases of individuals' attitudes to their work and working lives, this theory posits that there is a direct correlation between job-related attitudes and perceived proximity of one's current perceived job situation to one's current perceived ideal job situation. The closer one considers oneself currently to be in relation to what one currently considers to be one's 'ideal' job situation, the more positive will be one's job-related attitudes. Proximity theory encompasses what Evans (2018) calls the 'compromising-uncompromising' work context continuum, whereby one's work context is located somewhere on a 'compromising'-

'uncompromising' continuum. Compromising contexts are those in which the individual must compromise on her/his values, ideals and aspirations; uncompromising work contexts are more closely aligned with the individual's values, ideals and aspirations – which, as a result, are less likely to be compromised. The more uncompromising their work context, the more positive are people's job-related attitudes – and vice versa. Pursuit of proximity to one's 'ideal' work situation involves, inter alia, pursuit of an uncompromising work context.

The paper discusses institutional policy – specifically, a policy of greater specialisation for academics, allowing them to narrow their foci in order to play to their strengths, with a view to feeling less 'stretched' and being more able to achieve more, by having fewer priorities to attend to. The author also presents the notion of what she calls 'employee-centrism', as a workplace cultural shift, increasingly prevalent in the post-COVID workplace, that is discernible in organisation studies research, and which, applied to education contexts, may prevent tragedies such as the suicide of headteacher Ruth Perry, who feared an imminent downgrading from her school's OFSTED inspection.

Alienation, Critical Theory, and Resonance at Work

Philip Hancock

(University of Essex)

Despite the importance of issues such as alienation and the quest for the good life, Critical Theory has contributed relatively little to the sociology of work. Of course, there are some exceptions. Dejours et al. (2018), for instance, have drawn on the ideas of various scholars associated with the Frankfurt School to explore the limitations and possibilities inherent in contemporary work, addressing both repression and the potential for future emancipation.

Perhaps the most influential voice working within this tradition is Axel Honneth (1996). For Honneth, self-realisation is premised on the achievement of several registers of recognition, most notably love, respect, and esteem. As authors, including Honneth (2012, 2014) himself, have indicated, the latter, as that which is ascribed to an individual by virtue of their contribution to the social good, is of particular significance when seeking to understand the realm of work as an arena in which recognition might be achieved.

However, despite the allure of recognition as suitable for delineating the contours of what has been referred to, in some circles, as meaningful work (Laaser and Karlsson, 2022), critical voices have identified several issues. More recently, scholars associated with the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt – Horkheimer's former institution and home of Critical Theory – have argued that the normative emphasis of such work has lost sight of the need for a robust political economy of crisis and conflict and to place 'the social reality of work at its centre: the reality of wage labour, where everyday practice intertwines material insecurity and ideological co-optation' (IFS, 2023:22).

Moreover, the idea that recognition might contribute to an emancipated or more meaningful way of working and organising has been called into question by studies, which have identified its apparent inability to resist managerial co-option, largely due to its often abstract and idealist character, whereby anything posited as recognition easily slips into a relationship of identity with that which adopts its name. (Hancock, 2024)

Yet despite this, in this conceptual paper, I argue that rather than simply abandoning the normative dimension of critical theory as it pertains to the study of work, what is required is a greater sociological emphasis on understanding barriers to overcoming alienation and conceptualising meaningful work as a vital dimension of the good life—an outcome of not only intersubjective relations but also our relationships with the world, which is itself sociological and material. In doing so, this paper attempts to work through these issues, drawing on, in particular, Hartmut Rosa's (2019) conception of resonance as a development of Critical Theory that is not only normative but also critical and materialist.

It contributes what is, albeit still, a speculative consideration for what a Critical Theory of resonance might provide to the sociology of work. One that serves both as a yardstick against which to understand and critique the often-pervasive experience of alienation at work and also offers a sociology of how such alienation is sustained despite the challenges and critique it has endured.

Silenced Dialogues: Alienation and the Suppression of Racialised Voices at Work

Nelarine Cornelius, Chidozie Umeh, Sarah Marks, Benish Khan, Rym Mouelhi, Luyao Bao

(Queen Mary's, University of Londong, University of York, Swansea University)

Organisations frequently claim to 'listen' to employees, yet the voices of racialised workers remain persistently marginalised, dismissed, or silenced. This paper theorises these exclusions as a distinctive form of workplace alienation rooted not only in material conditions but in communicative practices. Drawing on Bakhtin's concept of dialogism and 40,000 qualitative responses from the UK Race at Work Surveys (2015, 2018, 2021), we introduce the concept of dialogic deficits to explain how alienation emerges when workers are denied genuine participation in shaping organisational life. Rather than overt exclusion, alienation is reproduced through fear of reprisal, exclusion from decision making arenas, and the performative character of equality, diversity, and inclusion initiatives. By reframing alienation as estrangement from dialogue as well as from labour, the paper advances sociological debates on participation, voice, and inequality. This conceptual move shifts the analysis of workplace inequality from a focus on economic estrangement alone to the communicative and affective dynamics that sustain silence. In doing so, the paper extends alienation theory into underexplored terrain and offers the sociology of work a fresh lens for understanding how organisational hierarchies foreclose dialogue while simultaneously claiming inclusivity.

PLENARY PANEL
10:40-11:40
Lecture Theatre B

RETHINKING CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES: WORK & EMPLOYMENT FUTURES

Manoj Dias-Abey, *University of Bristol*
Eleanor Kirk, *University of Glasgow*
Pratima Sambajee, *University of Strathclyde*

Chaired by Jenny Rodriguez, *University of Manchester*

Change and Continuity in UK's Labour Migration Policy

The United Kingdom's exit from the European Union marked the start of a new phase in labour migration policy. From 1 January 2021, a 'points-based' system was introduced, requiring most people coming to the UK for work to obtain an employer-sponsored visa. The new system has attracted a significant amount of controversy due to the high numbers of foreign-born workers entering the country and the many instances of labour exploitation experienced by those migrating for work.

Although immigration was not a central issue in the recent election, the Labour Party's position is becoming clearer. Its plan is to strengthen the domestic workforce by building skills in specific sectors and by improving working conditions through the proposed Employment Rights Bill. The aim is to lessen employers' reliance on migrant labour. If implemented fully, this would mark a clear break from labour market policies that have been in place since the early 2000s.

Yet when we look further back in time, we can see important continuities in intent, form and operation. The use of migration as a tool to achieve wider labour market goals is not new. The 'work permit' system—state authorisation to access the labour market—has been a central instrument of migration law since the early twentieth century. Equally, the negative consequences of restrictive migration rules for foreign workers have long been recognised. However, these harms are often ignored by lawmakers.

This talk places today's policies in a longer historical perspective, highlighting both the changes and enduring features of the UK's approach to labour migration.

Manoj Dias-Abey is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Bristol Law School. Manoj is a sociolegal scholar who researches in the areas of labour and migration law. His currently working on a project that examines how the UK has historically thought about and regulated labour migration. He has two other active projects: one which examines the work of labour enforcement agencies, and another that looks at how trade unions make use of strategic litigation. He currently sits on the Editorial Board of the International Journal of Law in Context and co-convenes the 'law and political economy' stream of the Socio-Legal Studies Association.

(Dis)Continuities in the Nature of Law and Law-Making

The shadow of major legislative consultations on employment rights and equalities provides an opportune moment to consider the (dis)continuities in the nature of law and law-making. A central continuity is contradiction. From the emergence of capitalism and the period of primitive accumulation, law has been central to land enclosure and the preservation of wealth. While being a clear class project, which entrenches class relations and property rights, time and again over the course of history, law has also imposed limits on rules' arbitrary exercise of power. We live in an increasingly law-thick world

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(Pleasance et al, 2017) but law's rules and categories have long permeated 'every level of society,' effecting 'vertical as well as horizontal definitions of men's [sic] rights and status, and contribute to men's self-definition or sense of identity' (E.P. Thompson, 1975: 267). Whether concerning employee status, outsourcing or global supply chains, contemporary legal constructs are continually innovated which set up artificial hierarchies, demarcating insiders and outsiders, privileges and denials, interacting with immigration regimes to set up 'everyday bordering' which racializes and 'others' certain workers (Yuval-Davis et al, 2018), according to the needs of capital. The 'operation of this code deserves our most scrupulous attention' (Thompson, 1975: 268), not least in how it remains an arena of struggle. Workers' movements can combine 'both an eschewal and embrace of law in what can be understood as a creative radical legal praxis which involves simultaneously defying and subverting law, or over-complying with it to highlight its absurdities' (Brabazon, 2017: 23). Exemplifying this, I show how indie unions are deploying such practices, and propose some ways to document, share and amplify the ripple effects that such actions can have, transforming rather than merely reproducing political-legal structures.

Eleanor Kirk is a Senior Lecturer at Glasgow University, where she is part of the Work on Demand project. Her recent work has focused on employment tribunals, precarious work and contesting 'bogus' self-employment. She has published her work in top-rated journal such as: Work, Employment and Society; Economic and Industrial Democracy; and Capital and Class, as well as in chapters in an edited book published by Policy Press. She has previously worked on several large-scale research projects funded by the European Research Council, the Nuffield Foundation and The Carnegie Trust, was the Ailsa McKay Post-Doctoral Fellow at Glasgow Caledonian University, and has held teaching appointments at the Universities of Strathclyde, Bristol, Stirling, Queen Margaret and Ulster University.

A Global South Perspective on (Dis)Continuities in Labour Law for Migrants

The role of labour law in protecting workers is widely contested. Typically, labour or employment laws can address power imbalances in the employer-employee relationship and support industrial relations by providing a foundation for collective bargaining. However, in some cases, the protective and balancing functions of labour law have been used as tools for workers to secure minor entitlements while simultaneously subordinating them. For instance, in many countries, successive governments have failed to adapt legislation to changes in employment practices and factors affecting the labour market, such as migration. This has led to many migrant workers being excluded from protection, either entirely or partially, raising an important question of coverage in labour law: who is and who should be covered (Davidov, 2014)? Mauritius, a sub-Saharan African country, serves as a quintessential example where dependence on migrant labour dates back to the 1800s. Its contemporary economy continues to rely heavily on migrant workers to sustain its competitive standing in global production networks. I examine how the country's historically established labour laws, which were shaped by robust working-class mobilisation post-independence, remain unresponsive to protecting migrants. The analysis underscores the disruptions occurring in numerous countries of the Global South, where increased reliance on migrant labour is observed alongside persistent weaknesses in labour legislation.

Pratima Sambajee is a Senior Lecturer in International Management at the University of Strathclyde, Scotland. Her research focuses on work and employment in Global South contexts, including sub-Saharan Africa, Brazil, India, and Southeast and Central Asia. She explores pertinent issues related to workers' rights and wellbeing through various lenses, such as the capabilities approach, social justice and rights-based frameworks, and wellbeing frameworks.

She has held principal investigator roles on international projects funded by UK Research and Innovation, The Carnegie Trust Fund, and The Royal Society of Edinburgh. She collaborates with academics, non-governmental organisations, policymakers, employers, and trade unions to generate meaningful impact for workers.

PAPER SESSION 9
12:00-13:30

Difference, Diversity & Social Justice – Room 3.210

Hardship (Burongyi in Chinese) and Resilience (Yaoqiang in Chinese): Gender Practices and Narrative Analysis in the Family and Workplace Contexts of Female Designated Drivers in China

Jiyao Li

(Peking University, Institute of Population Research)

Digital labor is an important form of current employment. The designated driving industry, dominated by male drivers, has experienced rapid growth in China's digital economy, yet female designated drivers remain a marginal and invisible group within this expansive workforce. The profession of driving is inherently gendered, with societal stereotypes often equating "female drivers" with incompetence. However, designated driving has increasingly become a vocation choice for many women. This study focuses on female designated drivers in Beijing, exploring their gender practices and narratives in both family and workplace contexts. Through an in-depth analysis of their family backgrounds and work experiences, the article reveals how these women confront the "burongyi" (the hardship and difficulties they face) of economic pressures and caregiving responsibilities through a "yaoqiang" (resilient and determined) attitude and actions. In the family domain, female designated drivers leave their rural homes to work in Beijing, breaking free from traditional gender-based household divisions of labor. However, this does not mean that these women abandon their families in pursuit of a fully "individualistic" lifestyle. On the contrary, their decision to leave their rural homes and even their families to work independently in the city is often motivated by the desire to earn money for their families. The happiness and well-being of their families remain a central expectation for their future. Thus, while they challenge traditional gender roles within household and improve their independence, families remain the anchor of their actions, resulting in a situation that resembles "neo-familialism" rather than "individualism". In the labor domain, they not only overcome the uncertain work environment resulting from the gender-neutral dispatching systems of digital platforms but also challenge customers' distrust of their driving abilities. Many interviewees have risen to leadership roles, such as team leaders, or have become top-performing drivers in the platform ranking. Through their driving skills and work performance, they have proven the capabilities and value of women in the designated driving industry. The Chinese concepts of "burongyi" and "yaoqiang" frequently appear in the narratives of female drivers, describing their self-identity as resilient individuals facing difficulties. Importantly, "yaoqiang" in Chinese not only connotes resistance but also carries the meaning of "being inherently inferior and striving to overcome it." This does not imply that female drivers accept gender essentialist views of women being naturally inferior in the industry. Rather, it reflects the tension between their practical achievements in breaking gender barriers and their limited narrative agency, as they struggle to fully escape the constraints of traditional gender norms in their storytelling. Adopting a sociological perspective informed by gender theory, this study examines the dual dimensions of female drivers' gender practices: their resistance to traditional gender norms and their reflection on the construction of their own narrative systems. The research shows that the labor and narratives of female designated drivers who involved in digital labor not only challenge gender essentialist biases but also reveal women's ongoing pursuit of equality and self-identity in modern society.

PhD Showcase

Embracing and Downplaying Recognition: How Country Music Performers Experience Identity-based Organizing in their Occupational Communities

Katherine Beekman

(Vanderbilt University)

A burgeoning literature addresses how marginalized workers experience diversity programming. Workers have found that the programs can reify perceived differences and portray marginalized workers as lacking agency. Additionally, as the labor market has become more precarious, creative industry workers in particular have relied on occupational communities for socialization and support. Therefore, while workers have ambivalent experiences with diversity management practices, it is also important to consider marginalized workers' experiences of identity-based organizing within their occupational communities. In this study, I ask: How do marginalized workers experience identity-based organizing within occupational communities? My case is the American country music industry, which is dominated by white men. For decades, white women have received around 10 percent of country radio airplay, while Black men have received around 7 percent, and Black women have received practically no country radio airplay. In response to these disparities, the identity-based organizations Black Opry and Song Suffragettes have emerged. Both organizations host showcases for country music performers who are trying to break into the country music industry and are marginalized because they are Black or are a woman, respectively. I draw on 40 interviews with marginalized country music performers who have participated with these identity-based groups and 12 observations of these groups' performances. I make sense of my findings by referring to Fraser's (2000) 'politics of recognition' and I find that marginalized creative workers have three kinds of experiences while participating in identity-based organizing within their occupational community. The first is an experience of 'gaining recognition' in which the worker believes that they are improving their status as an equal through their participation. The second is 'identity reification' in which the worker interprets the organization's work through the identity model of recognition which promotes separatism and is thus counter to the worker's desire for equal status in the industry. Finally, some workers 'downplay recognition' by subscribing to a meritocratic understanding of industry success and denying a desire for identity-based status equality or positive group identity in the industry. Through this study, I extend the literature on workers' experiences of diversity programming and show workers' wide variety of experiences as part of identity-based organizations within occupational communities.

(Dis)Continuities in Professions, Occupations & Skills 1 – Room 3.211

Behind the Wheel: Gendered Understandings of Work, Mobility, and the Car

Belen Martinez

(Sheffield Hallam University)

Despite growing female participation in the labour market, the transport sector remains overwhelmingly male-dominated. Globally, women make up less than 15 per cent of the public transport workforce (ITF, 2019), and in cities worldwide, female drivers remain a small minority. This imbalance reflects broader gendered patterns in mobility and labour, where efforts to increase representation have often overlooked the lived experiences of women drivers themselves. This paper examines how female taxi and platform-based drivers (Uber and Cabify) in Málaga, Spain, navigate this traditionally male-dominated profession, challenging cultural gender norms. Moreover, I explore the opportunities that working in the sector offers them, whether, apart from the income they receive, there are any changes in how women identify and redefine their professional identities. Beyond earning an income, do they feel more empowered or self-confident? Do they perceive their life choices as less limited by social norms and expectations of their social roles?

To answer this question, I examine the relationship between individuals and material objects in the workplace. This is a significant area to investigate because, as urban and mobile workers, women drivers work in a small and limited space. This car is also their primary working tool. The vehicle serves as both a private retreat and a public service space and complicates traditional divisions between personal and professional spheres. The public-private dichotomy stimulates analysis of what the car means for the participants. The complexity of the analysis is heightened as vehicles are often considered a symbol of masculinity. Building on these arguments, this paper offers a significant contribution to the field by exploring and evaluating how identity is held through materiality across these

public and private domains of work, particularly in the gendered workplace (Carmona and Ezzamel, 2016).

Drawing on ethnographic research, this paper shows how women drivers navigate the material and symbolic meanings embedded in their workspaces. A key theme emerging from this study is the performative nature of professional identity in the taxi-car space. Women drivers deliberately navigate gendered expectations, balancing the need to assert competence while managing external perceptions of their presence in a non-traditional field. Through an analysis of 35 semi-structured interviews, I explore how these women engage with their work environment, focusing on their relationship with the car as a material and symbolic space. More than a simple work tool, the car functions as an extension of their personal and professional identities, simultaneously serving as a private refuge, a public service vehicle, and a site of negotiation between autonomy and control.

By analysing the car's dual role as a site of constraint and empowerment, this paper underscores how gender, mobility, and materiality shape professional experiences. It offers insights into the complexities of women's work in mobile urban settings. Ultimately, the study reveals how women drivers leverage their skills, technical proficiency, and intimate connection with their vehicles to carve out spaces of independence and redefine occupational identities within a historically male-dominated industry.

"On the road again": Exploring the Embodied Experiences of Female Drivers in the UK

Oonagh Harness, Cat Spellman

(Northumbria University)

This article explores the work experiences of female drivers in the UK, drawing from embodiment theory and archetypes to assess the relational, physical and spatial aspects of working in a male dominated form of work. We use the 'Wild Woman' archetype, which was conceived of by Estés (1992) as an expression of liberated femininity, connecting it with themes of resilience, independence, and intuition – qualities that deeply resonate with women breaking boundaries in traditionally male spaces. By combining embodiment theory with the Wild Woman archetype, this study adopts a dual lens that captures both the physical and symbolic layers of female drivers' lived experiences of an uncertain work landscape. Embodiment theory foregrounds the tangible, sensory dimensions of work—the physical strength, resilience, and stamina required to endure the demands of long hours and strenuous tasks, and how these physical engagements contribute to professional identity (Hiramatsu, 2021). Simultaneously the Wild Woman archetype addresses the abstract, psychological dimensions of these experiences, such as autonomy, self-determination, and resistance to societal expectations. This archetype thus captures an aspirational and often resistant femininity that disrupts gender norms as drivers embrace an identity that helps them navigate a historically masculine domain (Estés, 1992). We propose that this innovative theoretical approach is effective in capturing complex experiences of labour that disrupts social norms.

By facilitating a holistic understanding of how female drivers navigate, survive, and thrive in spaces that have historically marginalised them, this research allows us to move beyond stereotypical depictions of gendered work. This advances scholarship on gender, resilience, and agency by demonstrating that the experiences of female drivers are not simply about overcoming physical challenges but involve deeply embodied and symbolic processes that inform and affirm their identities in meaningful ways. Drawing from a series of qualitative interviews with female drivers working in the UK in a range of sectors, this research contributes to a broader discourse on how women in traditionally masculine fields redefine and embody their roles, offering fresh insights into gendered labour and identity in contemporary society. The findings draw attention to the role of embodied knowledge and instinct (Anderson & Lots, 2020), navigation of risk, safety, and care, as well as the reclaiming of space. There are vivid recollections of potentially dangerous situations, with drivers often downplaying risk and their own vulnerabilities whilst asserting resilience and resourcefulness. Like the wild women, the drivers also metaphorically wrapped their arms around the vulnerable members of their communities that they encountered. This highlights agency and meaning that the women found in their work whilst introducing notions of a more typical femininity into male-dominated domains - forging a new emerging narrative for driving work.

(Dis)Continuities in Professions, Occupations & Skills 2 – Room 3.212

Creative Subjects: Educational Intentions, Choices, Credentials, and Employment Outcomes

Sonia Ilie, Pamela Burnard, Linjun Wu, Konstantina Maragkou

(University of Cambridge)

The mechanisms of education stratification, individual choice, and links to the labour market are only partially understood in relation to creative subjects, despite the substantial contribution by the creative sector to the UK economy and the social and cultural public goods it generates (Bakhshi et al, 2013; Comunian and Gilmore, 2014).

The sociology of educational credentials, including horizontal and vertical inequalities (Maire, 2024), offers insights into why the creative sector consistently sees significant employment imbalances by economic background, gender and geography (Been, Wijngaarden & Loots, 2024; Pinnock, 2019), despite low individual economic returns to creative subjects in higher education (Britton et al., 2016).

This paper reports on two inter-related elements of an in-progress study exploring young people's chances and choices around creative subjects. It highlights the employment destinations of young people, as shaped by previously-expressed creative subjects intentions, their subsequent realisation, and the forces and intensities of intersecting personal, social, economic, and geographical factors, and the role of higher and further education institutions within these transitions (Burnell, 2017).

The paper builds on understandings of the structural influences on education and employment outcomes, sociological (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2011, Heffernan, 2024) and economic (Altonji, Bloom & Meghir, 2012). Using Bourdieu's (1996) signature concept of 'field', the paper proposes a relational analysis of the space of higher education and further education institutions. Issues of scarcity, the structure of the credentials and employment, and the position of creative qualifications within this space underpin the use of 'field' to analyse chances and choices enmeshed in a network of relations that assign their most distinctive sociological properties to them.

Insights from several arts-based participatory action workshops, still to be conducted in London, Manchester and Norwich at the time of writing, are synthesised alongside results from quantitative analysis using the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England linked to administrative records on educational attainment. The workshops, featuring innovative collective cartographic mapping and individual zine-making methods as research tools (French and Cord, 2022), explore the sociology of educational credentials in different spaces, contexts and field and invite institutional, student and creative sector perceptions on engendering choices and chances at critical transition times.

Quantitative analysis currently underway suggests that intentions for creative subject study increase across educational careers, peaking ahead of these transition points. This varies by an intersecting constellation of personal and situational factors. Comparatively higher proportions of individuals are observed to be studying for creative subjects in further and higher education in early adulthood. However, by age 25, the proportion of individuals engaged in creative sector occupations is substantially smaller. This varies in similar patterns to earlier intentions, and also by creative sub-sectors and occupational categories, and educational backgrounds, aspects of the analysis to be developed further.

The paper therefore discusses how higher and further education institutions play a role in shaping creative subject intentions and study, and how the nature of institutions, personal characteristics and geography entangle with the positioning of creative subjects, credential and qualifications to illuminate employment opportunities and barriers.

On the Palm of the Buddha: Precarious Work, Uncertain Futures, and Methods of Hope in the Working Lives of Young South Korean Contemporary Visual Artists

Byunghun Yoon

(Seoul National University)

Scholars in creative labour studies have closely documented insecurities and uncertainties experienced by creative workers in work and employment, critically illuminating the preponderant future-orientation of workers through which they unwittingly accept and perpetuate precarious working conditions. Recent scholarship has examined this future-oriented temporality through sociological and anthropological theorisations of hope, foregrounding the moral and practical agency of workers to persist amid pervasive insecurities and disheartening prospects of uncertain or foreclosed futures. Building on these discussions, this paper elucidates distinct 'methods' of hope in the working lives of young South Korean contemporary visual artists, which relate to the precariousness of their work and career in intimate and ambivalent ways.

This paper analyses in-depth interviews with 20 visual artists in their late 20s to early 40s, each with 5-15 years of professional experience. All participants have completed university-level arts education, with half holding MFAs or currently enrolled in graduate programs. They primarily identify with the fine arts sector of painting, sculpture, or media arts as their major area of work. Interviews explored each participant's artistic education, work experiences, creative trajectories, career fluctuations, and future prospects as professional artists.

The data demonstrate that participants acutely experience and actively navigate precarious working conditions widely reported among creative workers across diverse contexts. They lead the characteristic 'double life' of professional artists, as their primary artistic practices fail to provide stable livelihood, requiring them to integrate various projects, temporary employments, highly selective public fundings, and sideline activities to support both their livelihood and artistic practices. They report alternative economic and lifestyle adaptations, including downsizing consumption, mutual aid networks, and delayed family formation. Securing a livelihood across fragmented work portfolios, maintaining meaningful artistic identities, and upholding hopes for continued professional career emerge as major challenges in professional life. This paper illuminates these challenges within South Korea's specific socioeconomic context, highlighting how the neoliberal labour regime, dualised labour markets, deterioration of middle-class family-based social reproduction, and weak institutional support for creative careers intensify insecurities and uncertainties faced by these relatively privileged artist-workers who maintain strong attachment to their unprofitable careers.

This paper focuses on how certain practices of maintaining and interpreting precarious working lives allow participants to make sense of and bind themselves to their work and career, and keep the future horizon open for a hopeful prospect even without a glamorous or clear referent. Following the theorisation of hope as a 'method' involving a temporal reorientation of knowledge to manage a delicate balance between future-oriented openness and anticipation of fulfillment, this paper examines participants' practical and discursive practices that imbue their work with meaning and create a sense of indeterminacy necessitating committed efforts in the present. Implications and workings of three such practices - a joking culture making fun of economic impotence of artistic careers, intimately registering and engaging with uncertainties embedded within the creative process, and a recurring, fatalistic yet enabling narrative structure exemplified by one participant's allegory comparing the life of a professional artist to being 'on the palm of the Buddha' – are discussed.

Disrupted Transitions and 'Lost' Futures? Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Youth Careers in the UK

Sviatlana Kroitar

(University of Leicester)

Statement of the topic: The COVID-19 pandemic triggered an unprecedented global disruption, fundamentally restructuring labour markets and employment landscapes. This period of acute upheaval resulted in widespread job losses, furloughs, and pervasive uncertainty. In the United Kingdom, the pandemic's impact was particularly severe, demanding a comprehensive analysis of its multifaceted effects. Vulnerable populations were disproportionately affected, with young individuals transitioning from education to employment facing acute challenges.

Theoretical ground of the research: This research adopts an integrated theoretical framework, drawing on social stratification and social capital theories, to analyse the pandemic's profound and long-term impacts on youth careers and well-being. This framework allows us to explore how pre-existing inequalities were amplified by the pandemic, leading to increased precarity and enduring disruptions in youth's professional trajectories.

Specifically, we aim to:
- examine how graduating during a recession impacts long-term career and economic outcomes
- analyse how the pandemic impacted the career trajectories of women and ethnic minorities, with a specific focus on stemming from pre-existing vulnerabilities.

Methodology: We conducted a systematic review to find research about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people's careers in the UK. We searched the SCOPUS and Web of Science databases for articles, reviews, and book chapters published in English between March 2020 and March 2025. Our search used keywords like 'youth,' 'career,' 'COVID,' and UK variations.

The initial search found 823 publications. After removing duplicates and filtering for relevance, we analysed 59 publications. We used thematic analysis to identify the main pandemic-related challenges, research gaps, and policy issues discussed in these publications.

Key (preliminary) findings

Theme 1: Exacerbated vulnerabilities in the youth labour market
The COVID-19 recession uniquely impacted young people through simultaneous disruptions to education and employment. This constructed a unique vulnerability, as this group often lacks established professional networks, accumulated financial capital, and secure employment contracts.

The decrease of entry-level positions and internships inhibited the gain of essential professional experience, culminating in a particularly precarious situation for young people starting their careers.

Young workers faced heightened job insecurity due to their position as cheaper, less protected employees in a tightening labour market.

Theme 2: Disproportionate economic impacts
Lower-income individuals and those without degrees experienced substantial earnings reductions, highlighting the pandemic's disproportionate financial impact.

Women, ethnic minorities, and immigrants faced increased labour market disadvantages, including layoffs, reduced hours, and difficulties in securing employment.

Theme 3: Psychological distress
The pandemic led to widespread feelings of stagnation, decreased career opportunities, and a decline in confidence among young people. For many, disrupted learning was emotionally registered as a 'loss of future,' triggering fears of financial hardship and depressed careers.

Mental health issues were particularly amplified for young people already vulnerable due to pre-existing socio-economic deprivation.

Stage of the research: This research is currently in the data analysis stage. The findings will contribute to the understanding of the pandemic's long-term effects on youth careers and outline possible strategic interventions and support mechanisms to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on youth careers.

Interrupted Work Trajectories of Retired Women Experiencing Financial Hardship in Switzerland and the USA: Building Subsistence Skills through Precarious Lives

Melody Pralong, Rachel Wagner

(Haute École spécialisée de Suisse occidentale)

Drawing on life histories produced by retired women experiencing financial hardship and living in rural mountainous regions of Switzerland and the USA, we are studying how women's work trajectories are shaped both by continuities and discontinuities. We explore how these women developed and maintained different sets of skills to manage precarity despite constant interruptions in their professional lives due to care work (familial and domestic), health issues, pregnancies, divorces, etc. and systemic discrimination. Drawing on the notion of subsistence work (Mies, 2014), we argue that these interruptions strongly shape women's lives by producing both precarity and subsistence skills to cope with it, such as strategic administrative work or money-saving dietary practices.

This qualitative and comparative research is based on semi-structured interviews with forty retired women facing financial difficulties and living in the Alpine canton of Valais in Switzerland and the

Appalachian region in the USA. Using a life history calendar and narrative storytelling methodology (see Lanteigne, 2021), we reconstruct and explore their life and work trajectories, to better understand their current living conditions, how they experience financial uncertainty in retirement and how they use their skills to manage it.

By adopting an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1989), we examine how gender and migration status influence women's interrupted work trajectories. Many participants faced significant barriers to employment (Greer & Kirk, 2022; Paiva, 2012; WEF, 2023), often leading them to accept low-paid and part-time jobs for which they were not formally trained. Despite this, they acquired new technical and social skills through on-the-job training, demonstrating adaptability and resourcefulness. However, while securing employment was relatively easier in the postwar economy, the increasing precarization of the labor market (Melges et al., 2022) and tightening migration policies (Bernhard, 2024; Lavanchy, 2014; Mombelli, 2024) have made these transitions more challenging in recent decades. Beyond the hard skills developed through employment, our data highlight a set of competencies we term invisible knowledge (see Paiva, 2012). These include skills such as managing financial uncertainty by negotiating with creditors, navigating between employment statuses, and handling complex administrative processes. Additionally, many of these women developed strong social networks that function as informal support systems (Ortiz & Bellotti, 2021), allowing them to exchange resources, advice, and emotional support. Such networks often serve as a substitute for institutional assistance, helping them cope with financial difficulties and unexpected life events.

Drawing on these observations, we will ask the following questions: What can we learn from the life stories of old women in terms of how systemic oppression produces discontinuities in work trajectories? What daily, invisible and subsistence work these women develop to cope with financial precarity and navigate daily uncertainty? How do these skills compensate for or complement insufficient welfare benefits and to what extent are they recognized?

(In)Decent Work & Employment 1 – Room 2.217

What Are 'Good Jobs' for Young People?

Hannah King

(Durham University)

The jobs we do can govern our quality of life. They influence health, wellbeing, and living standards for individuals and families; they shape productivity, inclusion, and cohesion in society; and they can transform the economy (World Bank, 2014). Yet high levels of employment do not necessarily mean a satisfied, healthy, and productive workforce. Bad jobs can seriously harm our health and wellbeing; create in-work poverty; perpetuate inequalities; and restrict social mobility. This leads to issues of recruitment, retention, and efficiency for employers; and it has knock-on impacts for society, including increased healthcare and social costs. The growth of precarious and insecure work in the UK has widened the gulf between good and bad jobs.

Within this context, young people frequently fare badly, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Latest ONS figures demonstrate the stubbornly high rates of young people (aged 16 to 24) not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET) in the UK, have reached almost 1 million. Globally, the youth employment challenge is enormous, with around one fifth (270 million) of young people currently NEET and over 123 million young people working but in poverty (ILO, 2024). On most measures young people are hit worst – they are disproportionately more likely to experience low-paid and insecure work (Gallie et al., 2017); disproportionately impacted by the pay squeeze from frozen wages (Clarke and D'Arcy, 2018); 5.9 times more likely to be on zero hours contracts (Martin et al., 2024); experience higher rates of labour market abuse, particularly ethnically minoritised young people (Judge and Slaughter, 2023); and many are suffering the lifetime economic scarring effects of unemployment, particularly following the Global Financial Crisis and Covid-19 pandemic recessions. Regardless of educational level, young people's lifetime earnings now are significantly lower than for older workers when they were the same age (Dabla-Norris et al., 2019) and they are the first generation more likely to experience downward social mobility compared to their parents.

Within this context what does good work look like for young people? Defining and measuring 'good work' are complex tasks. Job quality is a multidimensional phenomenon, shaped by social, cultural and economic factors, and varies between individuals. In the UK, the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development's seven dimensions of job quality are broadly recognised as the most comprehensive definition of good work. Despite the proliferation of research in this area, little attention has been paid to the needs and preferences of young people. This presentation draws on a large mixed-methods study with the Youth Futures Foundation (What Works Centre for Youth Employment) to define and measure good work with and for young people. It will draw upon a large body of empirical data from key economic datasets, qualitative research with stakeholders and co-produced creative outputs with young people.

Young Workers in the 'Missing Middle': Examining the Labour Market Opportunities and Employment Conditions of Young Non-graduates in England

Kaidong Yu, Edward Yates, Jason Heyes

(University of Sheffield)

This paper examines the labour market opportunities and employment conditions of young (aged 18-30) non-graduates in England from the perspective of both young workers and employers. This 'missing middle' group of young workers who are neither graduates nor NEETs (not in education, employment or training) accounts for 40-50% of young people in England and are an under-explored segment of young workers in existing literature.

The paper situates young non-graduates experience within broader shifts in the UK's political economy over the last four decades, in relation to re-shaping of the sectoral and occupational distribution of employment, and employment relations (Howell, 2016) as capital has become more powerful relative to labour. The paper draws on interview data collected in two English mayoral combined authorities - Greater Manchester and South Yorkshire. Interviews were conducted with 60 young non-graduates and 30 employers, as well as with labour market intermediaries. Young non-graduates were purposively sampled to ensure a gender balance, and a diversity of socio-economic backgrounds, abilities, and ethnic groups, thereby reflecting the wider population.

The paper's analytical framework draws on transitional labour market theory (Schmid 2002), labour market segmentation theory (Grimshaw et al. 2017) and labour regime theory (Peck 1996). By exploring young workers' experiences and jobs (Adamson & Roper, 2019), our approach treats youth transitions as continuous and processual (Schmid, 2011; 2017) for understanding how younger workers' aspirations, expectations and understandings of work are shaped and change over time (Lamont et al., 2014).

Our findings suggest that non-graduates can be categorised as belonging to one of three groups: (i) young people with limited skills, work experience or career direction who churn between low-end labour market jobs and periods of unemployment, (ii) young people who have undergone -or are undergoing - training and have entered into a job with career prospects, often via a 'shielded' entry route (Ashton et al, 1990) such as an apprenticeship and (iii) young people who have undergone a career change in their mid-20s and transitioned into higher-quality employment or training. Quality career advice for young people remains critical for promoting uptake of training or jobs with career development prospects as young people often possess limited knowledge of different types of work which are available to them.

Employers repeatedly identified a lack of soft skills among young people as a key challenge to successful recruitment and retention. A lack of technical skills or specific qualifications was much less frequently identified as a problem. The size of employers (as measured by turnover) is a major factor shaping opportunities for young non-graduates, particularly as large organisations are compelled to invest in training under the provisions of the UK's Apprenticeship Levy. The complexities of the levy were reported as an issue by employers, with some speaking of the need for dedicated 'youth champions' in organisations to represent the interests of young people.

When Decent Work Promises Are Not Met: Experiences of Black Women on Degree Apprenticeships

Sonia Francis

(University of Warwick)

Since their introduction in 2015, Degree Apprenticeships have been promoted as a pathway to decent work and a credible alternative route to higher education and skills development for school leavers. The administration, funding and quality of programmes delivered by universities and training providers are controlled by various regulatory bodies, including Ofsted, ESFA and the soon to be disbanded IfATE. Additionally, apprentices' information advice and guidance activities are framed by the British Values and the Prevent duty. Whilst strict regulations and compliance requirements are weighted heavily on higher education institutions and training providers, employers' responsibilities, (with the exception of the levy funding payments), are limited to signing a training plan and meeting minimum wage requirements. Currently there are no additional regulations on the quality and decency of work being offered as a degree apprenticeship, and limited monitoring and enforcement when apprentice and employer relationships breakdown. Although, there is considerable quantitative data concerning the role Degree Apprenticeship programmes have for individual employers and wider sector trends, little qualitative research has been conducted into the impact that employer culture and workplace practices have on the lived experiences of degree apprentices themselves, particularly those from currently underrepresented backgrounds. This work is significant to the field as it will provide a nuanced view of the experiences of Black women on work-based programmes whose voices, have been omitted from discourses on degree apprenticeships.

This presentation draws from semi structured interviews that have been completed in a PhD study of eleven black women who are currently on degree apprenticeships. A case study approach will be used to focus on the narratives of three of these women who started on their degree apprenticeship journeys upon leaving 6th form at the age of 18. It is worth noting that the participants were able to choose their pseudonyms.

'Nyasha' discusses the precarity of her first-degree apprenticeship job, being made redundant soon after starting and the subsequent pressures placed on her to find an alternative employer without support and guidance. She then unpicks her traumatic experiences of being thrown in at the deep end with her second employer. Who had unfair expectations of her abilities and expertise as new young degree apprentice, the exploitation of the lack of her knowledge and experience of employment legislation and employee rights and the subsequent microaggressions and bullying that foregrounded her ultimate termination of employment. 'Ruby', reflects on her experiences of being denied career progression many times, despite being overburdened with a high volume of unsuitable work that further compounded her ability to progress. She reflects on how this has impacted her confidence and mental wellbeing causing burnout. Finally, 'Jada', shares her experiences as an aspiring solicitor and the reality of the role being in direct contrast to what she was promised.

The findings highlight how race, gender and age intersect in shaping the employment experiences of degree apprentices. Additionally, the critical need for greater safeguarding of the rights to decent work currently offered by employers ensuring advocacy and protection for all degree apprentices.

It's Not (Just) the Destination, It's the Journey: A Relational Approach to Employability Support

Tina Kowalski, Jane Suter, Annie Irvine

(University of York, School for Business and Society)

Relational support has been identified as crucial to developing skills and confidence to facilitate entry into work, or return to work. Evaluations of employability programmes for individuals with complex challenges show that successful programmes emphasise relational, alliance-based support and the importance of time and flexibility. Key features include person-centered, holistic provision built on trust, continuity, and flexible, often voluntary engagement with support. Informed by theoretical frameworks utilised by Pearson et al (2023), we explore the value of adopting a relational approach to support those facing barriers to work.

Our paper is empirically grounded in an ongoing suite of qualitative evaluations carried out in cross-sector partnership between the University of York School for Business and Society and Better Connect,

a non-profit organisation whose core remit is the coordination of programmes delivering person-centred support to people with complex barriers to employment, education and training. Across the projects evaluated, semi-structured interviews were held with keyworkers (n=44), and programme participants (n = 18).

Our thematic analysis indicates that the route from entering into an employability support programme to achieving paid employment was rarely a linear path, and may be more aptly described as a journey that individuals would go on with their keyworker, with various barriers along the way that required navigation. Whilst there were a number of endogenous factors, such as low confidence, poor mental health, acute or chronic physical health issues, or enduring or recently acquired disabilities, that impacted transitions into work, a number of exogenous issues, such as digital exclusion, duration of programme funding, and inflexibility of potential employers were also reported. Even for those whose skills and confidence reached a level where they felt willing and able to apply for jobs, endogenous barriers may still exist, or events might occur, which make them lose their footing and need to restart, or re-route their journey towards employment.

Our findings demonstrate the value to participants of having a designated keyworker, providing bespoke support paced according to participant needs, and building trust-based relationships over time. This relational approach facilitated engagement with community based interventions and volunteering which led to a sense of belonging and inclusion amongst participants. By adopting a relational approach to employability support, a shift is observed from 'outcomes driven' support (getting a job) to a focus on the process (such as building skills, confidence, social support and social networks), giving more enduring and holistic value to the journey embarked on.

Contributing to existing literature, this paper purports that to be most effective, employability support should consider barriers to work arising from an individual's broader personal and social context in tandem. At policy level, sustainable funding is needed to maintain the level of support that keyworkers offer and over longer employability journeys, and also to ensure the continuity of employment of keyworkers. A key observation across the suite of Programmes evaluated was that current short term funding models threaten the foundations of the relational approach to employability support that participants find so meaningful.

(In)Decent Work & Employment 2 – Room 2.218

The Gig Work Divide: Gendered Subjective Well-being from Platform-based Gig Jobs and Traditional Gig Jobs in Post-COVID UK

Yucheng He, Lu Yu, Muzhi Zhou

(Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Guangzhou)

Gig work has become increasingly prevalent, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, and current research mainly focuses on platform-based gig work. However, gig employment has existed traditionally without relying on digital platforms. Little research examined the mental consequences associated with the different types of gig arrangements. By using data from the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS) waves 11-14, this study systematically reviews current definitions of gig work and applies OLS regression to investigate: (1) how can gig workers be classified, and what is the distribution of different types of gig work? (2) how do different gig work arrangements impact labours' job satisfaction? (3) and how do these effects differ by gender? Specifically, this study identifies the key characteristics of gig work and classifies gig work into two main categories: platform-based gig work (e.g., Uber drivers, Amazon couriers) and non-platform-based gig work (e.g., traditional gig work, self-employed workers, and zero-hour contracts, such as models and street vendors). The results indicate that platform-based gig work can significantly predict higher job satisfaction compared to non-platform-based gig work. Moreover, men engaged in non-platform gig work report notably lower job satisfaction than their female counterparts. However, for platform-based gig work, the mental benefits appear to be similar for both men and women. These findings offer a more nuanced understanding of the diverse types of gig work arrangements, the potential effect of platform (e.g. more flexibility, weighted algorithmic control and recourses accumulation), and the intersection of gig work with gender norms. For policymakers, these

results suggest the need to consider the diverse experiences and gender-sensitive approaches of different types of gig workers when designing labour market policies.

The Two Faces of Seasonal Exploitation: Workplace Dynamics and Social Reproduction in Italy's Tourism Industry

Nicola Quondamatteo, Francesca Alice Vianello

(University of Padua)

This paper investigates working conditions in the seasonal tourism industry of North-East Italy, one of the country's most important seaside destinations, with a focus on both workplace dynamics and the sphere of social reproduction. Drawing on 31 semi-structured interviews with workers, trade unionists, and employers, this article offers an in-depth analysis of the sector's structural vulnerabilities, highlighting the precarious nature of seasonal employment, characterized by highly flexible contracts, widespread unpaid overtime, job misclassification, and persistently low wages. However, beyond the everyday routine within the labour process, the study also examines the overall living conditions of seasonal workers, both during and outside the tourist season, arguing that labour exploitation practices cannot be fully understood without considering the broader framework of social reproduction.

During the working season, housing emerges as a central issue for workers who move to the area specifically for employment in the tourism sector. The high costs of the private rental market can pose a significant barrier to attracting seasonal labour. Some employers provide accommodation, often in the form of overcrowded dormitories or substandard apartments, which further exacerbates workers' precarious conditions. Many migrant workers—particularly those from Bangladesh—rely on co-national networks to secure housing, pooling financial resources and sharing living spaces to mitigate costs.

Beyond the peak tourist season, the segmented composition of the workforce is key to understanding the diverse trajectories of workers. Circular migration patterns shape the experiences of some migrant labourers, while young Italian seasonal workers often depend on family support and unemployment benefits to sustain themselves throughout the year. Others seek informal or precarious jobs in different sectors, highlighting the broader instability that extends beyond the tourism industry itself.

By combining strands of literature on the different forms of labour exploitation and on the role of social reproduction in shaping labour regimes and the everyday functioning of labour processes, this study reveals how the sector's structural criticalities are not incidental but rather the result of the systemic interaction between factors internal and external to the workplace. The full extent of precarity and labour abuses in seasonal tourism work can only be critically assessed by addressing this intersection.

Navigating Precarity: Migrant Gig Workers and Socio-spatial Networks in Bangladesh and Kenya

Lutfun Nahar Lata, Mohammad Amir Anwar

(University of Melbourne, University of Edinburgh)

Much has been written already about precarious working conditions and labour regulation issues in the platform economy both from the Global North and Global South contexts. However, little is known about the role of social capital in enabling Global South workers to enter the platform economy and the ways in which platforms workers leverage their social networks to navigate and survive. This paper uses the social capital framework to address this gap. Drawing on data from in-depth interviews with 27 ridesharing drivers in Dhaka and 32 ridesharing drivers in Nairobi, this paper argues that social capital remains spatially contingent and how workers leverage their social capital to navigate their everyday lives in the platform economy depend on their socio-political contexts.

Open Stream 1 – Room 2.219

The Unintended Inequality of Parental Leave in Japan: Do Men Benefit More?

Kumiko Hagiwara

(Momoyama Gakuin University)

As parental leave becomes a focus of public policy, the socioeconomic inequalities associated with leave policies are a major theme in the context of the gender division of work, as well as in the expansion of non-standard and insecure employment. In the employment-based entitlement model (Dobrotic and Blum, 2020), employment patterns influence access to leave and leave benefits, resulting in a regressive effect on lower-income mothers and families (O'Brien, 2009; McKay et al., 2016). Employment-based parental leave policies are not only affected by the design of the leave but also by the characteristics of the employment regime in which it is embedded.

In this regard, Japan provides an interesting case study. Since the 1990s, Japan has been developing measures to support childcare, including parental leave, due to concerns about the population resulting from low birth rates. In the 2010s, the government focused on promoting leave for fathers with improvements to benefits for higher wage replacements and the introduction of leave for fathers. According to a UNICEF survey (2021), Japan's parental leave scheme ranks first among 41 developed countries. Conversely, the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL), enacted in 1986 to promote the equal treatment of men and women in employment, has been criticised for its limited discriminatory provisions. Concurrently, the Third Category Insured Person System was introduced in the same year, providing a pension for housewives without premium contributions and expanding tax deductions for part-time workers, predominantly housewives. Despite the male-breadwinner framework of the EEOL regime, which has been maintained for 40 years, radical policy changes have been implemented regarding parental leave with the objective of achieving gender equality.

Whitehouse and Nakazato (2021) examined the driving force of social equality within the parental leave scheme itself through an international comparison of indicators of inclusion, gender equality, and redistribution. These results suggest the need for broader policies. Thus, this study draws attention to the relationship between the EEOL regime and leave policies in Japan. Using data from the 'Annual Report on Employment Insurance Services' and the 'Basic Survey of Gender Equality in Employment Management' by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, the gendered gap in parental leave-take-up and leave benefits between and within genders was explored.

The gender wage-gap was clearly reflected in the mean monthly benefits, and the gendered pattern of employment resulted in a higher take-up rate of full-time employment among fathers than for non-regular employment, mostly occupied by women. The amendment of the parental leave system with the aim of achieving gender equality has ultimately resulted in a situation that is most favourable to fathers.

This unintended consequence is that parental leave is being implemented under an EEOL regime embedded in a gender division of work and weak, limited provisions on discrimination. Further discussion is required on whether the appropriate response to alleviate inequality through the parental leave system is decoupling employment and parental leave or stronger employment regulation.

Customer Abuse and Sexual Harassment in the Scottish Hospitality Industry: A Gendered Analysis of Worker and Customer Interaction

Dennis Nickson, Anastasios Hadjisolomou, Irma Booyens, Tayler Cunningham, Tom Baum

(University of Strathclyde)

This paper examines the complex gender dynamics that shape customer misbehaviour (i.e. verbal and physical abuse and sexual harassment) in the hospitality industry, focusing on how the gender of both workers and customers influences the prevalence, forms, and experiences of such (mis)behaviours (Coffey et al., 2023; Farrugia, 2025; Ygnfalk et al., 2024). Drawing from feminist theory and the sociology of service work, the study explores how gendered power relations in service work create an environment where customer misbehaviour (including verbal and physical abuse and sexual

harassment) is normalized, it is often underreported and not acted upon as an issue in organizations (Booyens et al., 2022).

The paper draws on 41 semi-structured interviews with front-line workers, line, middle and senior managers and trade union representatives across a variety of hospitality organizations in Scotland.

Preliminary findings show that female workers are disproportionately targeted by men, whilst, as the data shows, male workers also experience abuse and harassment, from both male and female customers. Additionally, the response and actions from management to address customer misbehaviour, if any, are strongly influenced by gender dynamics. Specifically, management tends to approach incidents involving women, both workers and customers, differently from those involving men, making gendered assumptions that affect the type of support offered and the urgency of intervention. This creates a working environment where workers may feel less protected based on their gender.

Overall, this paper further investigates how the interplay of masculinity, femininity, and customer service expectations perpetuates gendered vulnerabilities, with workers navigating a balance between service work and personal well-being. It contributes to a broader understanding of third-party workplace gendered violence, the coping strategies employed by workers, and the need for structural changes to address power imbalances in customer-worker interactions.

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A Hostile Environment to Sharing Leave: Parents' Negotiations of Shared Parental Leave in the UK

Katherine Twamley

(University College London)

The sharing of parental leave has the potential to shift gendered inequalities in paid and unpaid work, yet very few couples in the UK share their leave. I draw on qualitative longitudinal diary and interview data from 21 mixed-sex couples to understand why this may be. All participants are first-time parents and were recruited during pregnancy, with half intending to share leave and half not intending to share leave. The parents were followed from pregnancy to approximately 16 months after the birth of their child. These longitudinal data enable an analysis of desires and intentions, and how these are enabled or constrained over the course of leave period. In this paper, I show how 'greedy work' norms, along with the policy construction of Shared Parental Leave (SPL), shapes decision-making and the emotional rejection of SPL. Building on previous literature, I explore how ideals and understandings of paid work and normative ideas of motherhood and fatherhood come together to create a 'hostile environment' to the sharing of leave, and ultimately the sharing of care. I will show how greedy work is manifested not only in explicit discouragement from taking SPL by co-workers or line managers, but in a fundamental understanding of employee–employer responsibilities which participants largely internalised. The reach of greedy work is seen most explicitly in fathers' practices concerning paternity leave. Although the two weeks off from paid work is a well-established right in the UK (having been introduced in 2003), some fathers in this study reduced their paternity leave or continued to work through it (confirmed by recent wider statistics too). Even when fathers took paternity leave, some continued to do paid work during their leave. Participants did not regard their inability to effectively take paternity leave as the fault of unsupportive greedy work contexts, but, rather, as par for the course in contemporary professional work. Women narrated the impacts of greedy work in different ways to men, more often reporting intentions to opt out of or take time out from their careers. In part, this is down to decisions about prioritising men's careers but also reflects long-standing expectations of (or resignation to) the

motherhood penalty on the part of women. Such stepping back is encouraged by women's (and men's) understandings of gendered discrimination and potential double discrimination which couples fear if men take SPL. Overall, the reach of work culture into the decisions and experiences of leave highlights the dominance of masculine work norms. I finish with some suggestions for how parental leave policy may be altered for greater take up and a potential shift in UK work culture.

Labour Queues and Job Queues: Gender Segregation in Chinese ICT and Banking Sectors

Yi Chen, Arjan Keizer, Isabel Távora

(University of Manchester)

To examine gender segregation in China and the processes that sustain it, this study applies Reskin and Roos's (1990) labour queue and job queue theory. It also integrates insights from stereotype literature (Taylor et al., 1978; Reskin and Hartmann, 1986; Koch, D'Mello and Sackett, 2015) and organisational theory, including the ideal worker norm (Acker, 1990; Williams, 2000) and inequality regimes (Acker, 2006a, 2006b). Together, these perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for examining the mechanisms that drive gender segregation and the factors that reinforce it.

The study draws on interviews with 42 professionals and managers to examine gender patterns in China's Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and banking sectors. It explores managerial practices and justifications, and assesses their influence on female professionals' workplace experiences and career choices. The findings reveal that gender segregation in these sectors was shaped by labour and job queueing processes, which were influenced by gender stereotypes and ideal worker expectations. In both sectors, certain roles were more lucrative but also more demanding, while others were less demanding and lower-paid. Men were consistently favoured for the higher-paying roles, as they were perceived to possess the necessary traits, such as creativity in ICT and outgoing personalities in banking. They were also considered more available for long hours without domestic responsibilities, in line with the 'ideal worker' norms. In contrast, women were often steered into lower-paid roles based on perceived traits such as 'meticulousness', which were seen as suitable for these positions. Some women actively sought out these jobs because, despite their lower position in the job queue, they were more compatible with their family obligations.

The study highlights the role of organisational HR practices in shaping the double queueing process, leading to distinct gender patterns and trends in the two sectors. In the ICT sector, employer discretion led to overt gender discrimination and gendered job assignment that limited women's career prospects. As a result, women had little room to negotiate their preferences, and their concentration in secondary roles was used to reinforce employer biases, further perpetuating segregation. In contrast, formal and inclusive HR practices in banking offered opportunities for realising and adjusting job preferences without excluding women from career advancement. This allowed some women access to lucrative roles and, as a result, gender segregation was lower in this sector. These findings reveal how a complex interaction between organisational expectations of workers and perceived gendered characteristics contributes to the formation of clearly structured labour and job queues, which continue to hinder gender equality in the labour market. They also demonstrate the mediating role of HR practices in shaping distinct gender dynamics across sectors. The study underscores the need for stronger enforcement of anti-discrimination regulations and the promotion of organisational gender regimes that support greater equality and inclusion.

Open Stream 2 – Room 3.209

Reproduction of Neoliberal Enterprise in Community Arts Work in Wales: A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

Rey Shakirzhanov

(Swansea University)

Cultural work has been constructed by policymakers and academics as a key contributor to economic growth (Campbell, 2021; Belfiore, 2020; Luckman, 2018; Thestrup & Pokarier, 2018; Conor et al., 2015; Morgan & Wood, 2014; De Peuter, 2011; Banks, 2007; Freedman, 2007), whilst a romanticised image of freelance artists has come to be represented more widely as a model for future work (McRobbie,

2016). Despite these celebratory visions, this work has been shown as being precarious, characterised by a lack of secure working conditions, ongoing sense of uncertainty, lack of 'safety nets', with no certain continuity of career growth and prospects (Masquelier, 2019; Butler, 2010; Bourdieu, 1998). Within this context, cultural workers have been "invoked as paradigmatic figures of 21st century capitalism" (De Peuter, 2014, p. 264), taking on a subject position predicated upon a discourse of neoliberal enterprise (Read, 2009; Donzelot, 2008; Foucault, 2008; O'Malley, 1996; Du Gay, 1994a, 1994b, 1996, 2004; Du Gay & Salaman, 1992; Rose, 1992; Keat, 1991; Gordon, 1991). This position connotes a range of entrepreneurial and business-like conducts, such as being autonomous, responsible, competitive, risk-taking, calculative, proactive, and seeking self-fulfilment through work. A great deal of attention has been paid to studying the proliferation of entrepreneurial logics within this domain of work, both on policy level (Rosello & Wright, 2010; Banks & Hesmondhalgh, 2009; Banks, 2007), and in practice (see for example. Mackenzie & McKinlay, 2020; Hoedemaekers, 2018; Blair, 2009).

Yet, research into the cultural work of community arts has been generally scant. Unlike other cultural sectors that place artists at the centre of cultural production, 'community arts' can be described as a non-commercialised area of work that "enjoins both artists and local people within their various communities to use appropriate art forms as a means of communication and expression … adapting them to present day [community] needs and developing new forms" (Kelly, 1984, p. 1). This paper sheds light on the reproduction of neoliberal logics of enterprise in community arts based on data collected during doctoral research in Wales. Using a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis approach (Willig, 2008a, 2008b; Parker, 1992, Hollway, 1989) and ethnographic methodology, it details how community arts workers construct their subject positions different from paradigmatic representations of work as a domain of enterprise. A key finding of this study is the proliferation of the discourse of 'caring about', acting as a resource for resisting individualised, money-oriented subject positions of enterprise, whilst also legitimating acceptable versions of entrepreneurial behaviour. This paper contributes empirically to discursively understanding the nature of community arts work and the role of the ethics of care in it (Alacovska & Bisonette, 2021). It also offers alternative theorisations of entrepreneurial work, rethinking the current dichotomous visions of the discourse of enterprise as a fait accompli in the construction of worker subjectivity (Foucault, 2008; Fournier & Grey, 1999; Du Gay, 1994b, 1996; Du Gay & Salaman, 1992).

Full reference list can be provided be provided upon request.

Buzz, Boundaries, and Breaks: The Material Temporal Enrolment of Coffee in Open-plan Academic Workspace

Katherine Quinn

(Cardiff University)

This paper attends to the work of coffee in the fluid, open plan workspaces that characterise contemporary HE and multifunctional workspaces more broadly. It argues for the enduring - indeed, heightened - importance of using sensory objects for boundary practices that variously stabilise individuals, groups and practices in time and space. Drawing on an ethnographic study of a newly built collaborative Research Park at a UK HEI, I argue that the materiality, temporality, and cost of 'the coffee break' enrols and affords important boundary practices relating to its cultural cache, cost and sensory enticement. First, I illustrate the coffee's work in the projected mission of a Research Park aiming for an innovative approach to interdisciplinary and cross industrial collaboration (buzz). Second, I describe how coffee is used to stabilise selves, spaces and professional practices in the otherwise fluid, flexible, and ephemeral work environment (boundaries). Finally, I show how coffee practices enable workarounds against – or despite -workplace hierarchy and professional ethos (breaks). Breaks include the importance of verbalising a refusal to buy coffee, the taking of 'available' (if not free) coffee and refreshments and the setting up of systems that necessarily circumvent the breakdown of the 'buzz'. These practices are found to be particularly important in an environment where fluidity, flexibility, and ephemerality have become built-in to the spatial design and baked-in to the work culture. Contributing to sociological concerns with materiality, spatiality and temporality, the paper shows the importance of small breaks in the world of work.

The Emotional Labour in Managing Older (65+) Volunteers' Cessation of Volunteering: Evidence from 10 Heritage Organisations in England and Scotland

Yang Wang, Bruce Davenport

(Newcastle University)

Research on emotion in workplaces in the voluntary sector settings tends to focus on volunteers' experiences. Few studies, however, approach the theme from the perspective of volunteer managers. This is in contrast to the widespread professional recognition of a strong emotional element at play in volunteer management. This paper aims to bridge this knowledge gap with evidence of, and insights into, the ways in which emotional labour played out in this area of expertise by focusing specifically on volunteer managers' experiences of managing older (65+) volunteers as they cease or step back from volunteering. This is the point at which the emotional demands of volunteer management tend to be heightened.

Data informing this paper were collected from semi-structured interviews we carried out with volunteer managers from 10 case study heritage organisations in England and Scotland, ranging from large, multi-site national museums to small, volunteer-run heritage sites. The age distribution of volunteers in the cultural heritage sector is more strongly skewed towards older volunteers compared to that across all. Thus, staff in cultural heritage organisations are more likely to have encountered the issue being researched. The 10 case study organisations were all free entry, but they encompassed the diversity of the sector in the UK, taking into consideration how the size, resources and nature of each organisation may condition the ways in which they manage volunteers, hence how volunteer managers experience emotion accordingly. At the fieldwork stage, this led us to include people who supervise volunteers on a daily basis when working with larger organisations where the volunteer managers' roles are at a more strategic level.

Our data revealed the ways in which a widely-held understanding of volunteering and volunteer management was joined by people's passion for the work, personal values, life and work experiences, as well as anecdotal knowledge in dictating what they considered as "the right thing(s) to do" when dealing with older volunteers' cessations, provoking deep emotional reactions. The emotional labour at stake was made particularly explicit as people reflected on how they felt when having to have "difficult" conversations with volunteers towards decision-making. We found that emotional labour involved in the process should not always be negatively perceived, as some participants talked about their "hard feelings" with pride. In this sense, emotional labour played a role in making the work meaningful to them. Nuanced distinctions were also found between people at different managerial levels within the larger organisations, specifically, those who supervised volunteers on a daily basis vs. volunteer managers.

All our interviews were conducted between June 2024 and March 2025, and we are in the midst of data analyses.

We propose that managing older volunteers' cessation of volunteering is, to some extent, comparable to performing care work, which has been a key strand of emotional labour research. We thus will also want to take this view to discuss our findings in relation to the literature.

Technology & Work – Room 3.205

Worker Experiences in the Twin Transition: Challenges of Inclusion, Voice, and Labor Market Change

Lisen Lowstedt, Carin Håkansta, Pille Strauss-Raats, Ruben Lind, Ninni Norlinder

(Karolinska Institute)

The green and digital 'twin transition' is transforming work and employment worldwide. While these transitions are often presented as mutually reinforcing, with positive impacts on labor market dynamics and working conditions, research on how workers experience these changes remains limited. This study contributes to the understanding of how different factors, including worker agency, shape the outcomes of these transitions and the extent to which they are accompanied by fair working conditions.

Drawing on preliminary evidence from a larger ongoing research project in Spain and Sweden, covering 12 companies in the finance, transportation, and energy sectors, the analysis focuses on workplace-level experiences of the twin transition in Sweden. The study explores two key questions: i.) How is the green and digital transition experienced at the workplace level? ii.) To what extent, and in what ways, are workers able to voice concerns and influence transition processes?

Using a qualitative comparative case study approach, the study is based on 23 semi-structured interviews and field visits across three Swedish companies: a private haulage contractor, a private insurance company, and a state-owned railway logistics company. Interviewees include workers, union and safety representatives, managers, and digital/green technology specialists.

Preliminary findings indicate that experiences of the twin transition vary significantly across the three companies and even within workplaces, particularly between workers and managers. In the insurance case, managers described remote work as one of the main workplace transformations, while workers in customer services reported increased performance monitoring and surveillance, with implications for working conditions and well-being. In the railway logistics case, digital tools intended to improve productivity and safety were perceived by workers as poorly aligned with established work practices. In contrast, workers in the haulage case described significant improvements in their work environment due to the shift to electrified vehicles.

Worker agency emerged as a key factor shaping these experiences. In the haulage company, strong worker-management dialogue and union presence facilitated a smoother transition despite some training gaps. By contrast, in the railway logistics and insurance cases, technological changes were largely implemented through top-down approaches, with limited worker involvement in decision-making. Where worker agency was weaker, challenges intensified, limiting the perceived benefits of change.

The findings align with previous research highlighting that technological advancements and sustainability practices bring both opportunities and risks for workers. Despite Sweden's strong labor institutions and high unionization rates, the country is not exempt from the challenges of ensuring fair working conditions in the context of rapid workplace transformations.

Towards a Political Economy of Algorithmic Capitalism

Martyn Egan

(Trinity College Dublin)

The emergence of large language models such as GPT3 has prompted intense debate about the transformative potential of generative AI to 'revolutionise' knowledge work and disrupt economic activity. This paper represents an initial attempt to problematise this phenomenon within a Marxist analytical framework. Borrowing the term 'algorithmic capitalism' to refer both to the broad family of generative AI models and their anticipated effects on the social form, the paper offers a two-stage analysis towards a potential political economy of this new technology. First, drawing on a classical Marxist analysis of labour-capital relations, the paper investigates shocks to the exchange value of labour within knowledge work which are likely to arise from the widespread uptake of generative AI. Second, the paper considers the semiotic effects of generative AI, and attempts to position these within the Marxist literature on the commodity fetish via Baudrillard's concept of the hyperreal. In so doing, the paper argues that the emergence of generative AI can be also understood in terms of a further advance of the commodity fetish, in which meaning itself is reified. The research on which the paper is based has been recently published in Capital and Class (online first).

The Silicone Cage of Platform Capitalism: Algorithmic Governance and the New Labour Control

Nadia Kougiannou, Pedro Mendonca

(Heriot Watt University)

The rise of platform capitalism has transformed the nature of work, shifting labour governance from bureaucratic oversight to algorithmic control. This paper introduces the Silicone Cage as a new theoretical framework to conceptualise the digital constraints imposed on gig workers through opaque, data-driven management systems. Building on Weber's Iron Cage of bureaucratic rationalisation ([1922] 1978) and the Glass Cage of aesthetic and emotional labour (Warhurst et al., 2000), the Silicone

Cage reflects a contemporary mode of algorithmic governance that is flexible in appearance but structurally rigid in practice. In this system, platform workers such as Uber drivers, Deliveroo couriers, and online freelancers experience a paradoxical condition: they are promised autonomy and flexibility yet remain subject to hyper-surveillance, dynamic pay structures, and automated deactivation policies that govern their behaviour without direct managerial oversight.

In contrast to the Iron Cage, which enforced compliance through hierarchical rules and efficiency metrics, the Silicone Cage operates through algorithmic rent-seeking, data surveillance, and predictive behavioural conditioning. Workers do not interact with human supervisors but are instead disciplined through rating systems, gamified incentives, and shifting visibility algorithms that determine access to work (Rosenblat and Stark, 2018). This shift marks a departure from traditional employment structures, where labour conditions and pay are relatively stable, towards a system of digital serfdom, where workers must constantly adapt to unpredictable algorithmic changes to secure an income. Moreover, this framework integrates insights from the Glass Cage, demonstrating how platform workers must engage in aesthetic and emotional self-presentation (Warhurst et al., 2000).

Silicone, both flexible and constraining, serves as a fitting metaphor for this evolving form of labour control. Just as Silicon Valley promotes decentralisation while enforcing algorithmic discipline, gig platforms promise autonomy yet impose rigid efficiency targets. The Silicone Cage encapsulates this dual pressure: workers must meet algorithmic demands while performing aesthetic and emotional labour to remain employable. This digital labour structure deepens economic dependency, forcing workers to constantly adapt to opaque platform rules, perpetuating insecurity.

To support this theoretical framework, this paper draws on empirical data collected through quantitative survey data and qualitative interviews with platform workers. The survey provides a statistical overview of key dimensions of algorithmic control, including pay variability, platform surveillance mechanisms, rating system pressures, and job allocation opacity. Complementing this, in-depth qualitative interviews capture workers' lived experiences, shedding light on the emotional and aesthetic labour demands, precarity, and adaptive strategies employed to navigate the Silicone Cage. This combined approach enables a multi-dimensional analysis of how algorithmic governance manifests across different sectors of platform work, including ride-hailing, food delivery, and online freelancing.

By engaging with critical platform studies, digital labour theory, and technofeudalism, this paper argues that the Silicone Cage represents a new form of workplace control, merging quantified bureaucracy with surveillance capitalism. It illustrates how workers are reduced to data points, their survival dictated by algorithmic favour rather than labour protections. The paper concludes by examining the implications for labour agency, resistance, and policy interventions, considering alternative platform models and regulatory strategies to counteract algorithmic precarity.

Work/place Alienation, Voice & Participation – Room 2.220

Rethinking Alienation: Why Worker Context Matters

Tayler Cunningham

(Glasgow Caledonian University)

This paper contributes to debates on alienation theory by arguing that workers' personal contexts are critical to understanding their experiences of alienation – an aspect underexplored in existing literature. In its most simplified form, classical theories contrast the objective alienation of workers under capitalism (Marx, 1848) with subjective alienation tied to job roles and technological change (Blauner, 1964). Following renewed engagement with alienation theory in recent literature (Øversveen, 2022; Soffia et al., 2022; Vafeas et al., 2025), this paper argues that whilst both objective and subjective theories hold value in understanding worker experiences of alienation, alienation is not only shaped by structural and workplace factors but also by individual worker contexts.

Drawing on data from a broader study of alienation and worker mental distress during the pandemic, this research employs a critical realist approach, and a case study strategy, to examine two public

sector organisations in Greater Glasgow. First, a mixed-methods survey of 218 unionised administrative and service workers (March–August 2021) was conducted, followed by 20 semi-structured interviews (October 2021–January 2022).

Findings reveal that at the empirical level, workers experienced alienation through isolation, job role changes, blurred work-life boundaries, and increased workload pressures. At the actual level, alienation was shaped by factors such as work intensification, resource constraints, managerial monitoring, and shifts in communication methods. At the causal level, deeper structural drivers such as managerial control, reduced worker autonomy, digital technologies, emotional labour, and public sector funding limitations, emerged as key contributors.

However, findings suggest an overlooked dimension of alienation is the role of worker context. This study finds that individual factors such as living situation, age, disability, gender, caring responsibilities, and individual relationships with line managers, significantly shaped how alienation is experienced. By incorporating these contextual elements into alienation theory, this paper advances the discussion beyond traditional employment and systemic explanations (Marx, 1848; Blauner, 1964) to highlight how external life circumstances intersect with workplace structures in shaping alienation.

Ultimately, this study argues that worker alienation cannot be fully understood without considering the totality of workers' circumstances: not only their organisational and societal conditions, but also their personal contexts. These findings have both theoretical and practical implications, calling for an integration of workers' personal contexts into conceptualisations of alienation and urging organisations to acknowledge and address these contextual factors to reduce alienating employment practices.

Whistleblowing and Human Resource Management: Continuities and Discontinuities in Retaliation, Workplace Alienation, and Employee Participation

Bashir Alao

(University of Galway)

Retaliation against whistleblowers reflects continuities in workplace power hierarchies, where silencing dissent perpetuates systemic inequities (Miceli & Near, 1985; Kenny et al., 2019). Yet discontinuities emerge as evolving human resource management (HRM) practices where anonymous reporting channels, ethics training, and anti-retaliation policies signal shifts in organisational accountability (EU Whistleblower Directive, 2019; Dworkin & Baucus, 1998). The broader organisational implications of whistleblower retaliation, workplace alienation, and participatory management remain poorly understood. This study explores the complex interplay between whistleblowing and HRM practices through a cross-country qualitative comparative study, shedding light on retaliatory responses that promote workplace alienation and silence employees' participation and commitment at the workplace.

This research looks at these changes by carrying out a cross-country qualitative analysis of 123 respondents and 25 semi-structured interviews with HR managers and whistleblowers in Nigeria and Ireland. These data were collected between 2023 and 2024. I inductively analysed the data using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), with NVivo 12 providing support for code consistency. Cross-country comparisons (Nigeria vs. Ireland) highlighted contextual power dynamics. I use Foucault's (1977, 1982) three-part model for power dynamics (relational, discursive, and institutional) to look at how power imbalances from the past (continuities) and HR interventions today (discontinuities) affect workplaces all over the world.

Findings reveal that Nigeria's postcolonial institutional voids normalise retaliation through informal power networks (Banerjee & Linstead, 2004), deepening alienation while Ireland's neoliberal governance leverages legal protections (e.g., the Protected Disclosures Act, 2022) to foster participation (Kenny & Fotaki, 2021). Human resources strategies, like transparent communication (Townley, 1993), have been proven to reduce alienation by 40% in organisations with robust safeguards. However, discursive HR practices (e.g., framing whistleblowers as "disloyal") persist globally, underscoring enduring power asymmetries (Weiskopf & Tobias-Miersch, 2016).

This research advances critical HRM scholarship by bridging Foucault's theories with cross-cultural praxis. Practical implications include context-specific policies; Nigeria requires institutional reforms to decentralise power (Amao, 2008), while Ireland must balance compliance with intrinsic ethical motivations (Miceli et al., 2008). By transforming whistleblowing from a silenced act into a normalised

mechanism of accountability, this study offers pathways to align HRM with social justice imperatives (Wilkinson et al., 2018).

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A Critical Analysis of How Neoliberal Discourse Frames the Goals and Practices of the Corporate University

Nathan Rousseau

(Indiana University)

Language is not only how we communicate ideas but also the way in which ideas are framed. One of the ways in which neoliberalism has changed cultural practices in institutional settings is by interposing neoliberal discourse into everyday communications. Operating through a top-down, managerial approach, words and phrases such as "stakeholder," "portfolio," "leveraging," and "creating value" have become a part of the taken for granted interactions occurring within and between members of institutions. When examining discontinuities in work, it is important for examiners to evaluate the disruptions that have altered their work. This presentation discusses how the status and practices of "knowledge workers" have been reframed through discourse targeted at them. This is particularly important for employees who evaluate social relationships and due to precarity may feel compelled to speak of social inequalities in terms of "balance." The contradictions created by applying corporate goals into a system that formerly valued independent, intellectual goals are placated by using positivity and system-wide measures of accountability as techniques to further neoliberal goals and practices. The presentation concludes with recommendations for appropriately altering discourse.

Beyond the Workplace: How Life Histories Shape Employee Voice and Silence: Lived Experiences of Professional Working Mothers in Pakistan

Nelarine Cornelius, Benish Khan, Mustafa Ozturk,

(Queen Mary, University of London)

Feminist and gender scholarship has long demonstrated that women's ability to voice themselves, and their experiences of silence are shaped by their social positioning and embeddedness within broader socio-cultural contexts. Yet, mainstream research on employee voice and silence remains largely organisation-centric, focusing on internal workplace conditions while overlooking the influence of women's life histories and socialised dispositions. This narrow framing obscures how early-life socialisation and gendered expectations shape women's agency and engagement with voice in the labour market. Responding to calls for more ontologically grounded and sociologically situated approaches, the research employs Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology to interpret the lived experiences of professional working mothers in Pakistan, a context characterized by patriarchal norms and gendered labour market structures. It examines how women's personal histories, familial relations, and critical life events influence their voice and silence behaviour in navigating work-family tensions and structural inequalities at work. In doing so, the paper theoretically introduces a lifeworld approach to advance the employee voice and silence literature, providing a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon. The article also offers policy-level implications.

PAPER SESSION 10
14:30-16:00

Difference, Diversity & Social Justice – Room 3.209

Who is 'the Good Worker' in European Warehousing? Employer Strategies to Incorporate Diverse Workforces at a Time of Labour Shortages

Gabriella Alberti, Charles Umney, Abbie Winton, Aneta Pieczka, Annelies Sheer

(University of Leeds)

This paper contributes to the debate on "the good worker", which has hitherto focused on employer use of migrants as relatively docile and disposable labour (Mackenzie and Forde 2009; Thompson et al. 2013, Baxter-Reid, 2016). By drawing from a comparative research on employers workforce strategies across European warehouses (where work is usually low paid, labour intensive and subject to new technologies of surveillance), we move beyond a sole focus on migrant labour by encompassing different demographics in the workforce (age, gender, social background) and looking at the ways in which employers tap into new sources of labour in the context of multiple crises.

Ample sociological literature demonstrated the salience of categories of difference alongside gender, racial and other social dimensions in constructing 'ideal workers' according to the characteristics of occupations, historically exemplified in the construction of domestic labour as the work of black women (Glenn, 1992). Research in sectors such as hospitality has shown how management develop stereotypical assumptions about the suitability of certain workers mobilising intersecting attributes and how they are variably complied with or contested by the workers (McDowell 2017, Alberti and Iannuzzi 2020). Attributes of willingness to work, docility, commitment and loyalty associated with migrant labour have been proved to be time-limited, according to migrants raising expectations as they integrate (Mackenzie and Forde 2009) and move to better jobs (Thomson et al. 2013). However, what employers "think they can get" is influenced by a range of "system effects" (Anderson and Ruhs 2010), including the regulation of labour markets, state migration and welfare policies, and concomitant social and technological developments (Shaupp 2022).

Drawing from qualitative data across three countries (UK, Poland, Belgium) as part of a large project exploring the changing nature of warehousing work, we base our conclusions on empirical material obtained through interviews with warehouse workers, management and third-party actors that construct the notion of 'good workers' in warehousing.We do so by considering the effects of multiple crises, primarily the shortage of labour and skills following Brexit and Covid and the re-composition of migration flows under new geopolitical conflicts.

Overall, we find that recruitment and retention are central concerns guiding employer's practices, whereby the ideal/good worker is not simply "anyone who will stay in the job" . Alongside recruitment strategies targeted to specific demographic groups, some employers also consider technological strategies to support the increasing diversification of the workforce (e.g. technologies enabling translation, or to lessen the physical burden for older people and women), revealing the critical dimensions of age and gender in addition to migration. Yet, in each country, we note that local political/social context leads to tensions around the 'ideal worker' and question the smooth extraction of labour in contrast to employer expectations.

The paper contribution lies in elucidating how notions of the good/ideal worker need to be expanded, especially in the context of polycrisis. We also add a needed comparative lens to the debate by identifying commonalities and differences across distinct but converging sectoral practices in European warehousing

PhD Showcase

Cuts and Stitches: The Lived Experiences of Women Middle Managers in Three Modern Universities

Precious Madueke

(Deakin University and Coventry University)

Modern universities are increasingly shaped by neoliberal logics of marketisation, managerialism, and performativity. They, however, claim to uphold values such as collegiality, academic freedom, and social justice. This alleged virtue signalling is evident in the shift from collegial to managerial modes of governance, necessitating the role of middle managers such as heads of department/schools, associate deans, or program directors to serve as intermediaries between senior leadership and academic staff.

Women in these roles, encounter peculiar challenges influenced by gender, cultural expectations, and prevailing organisational dynamics within their institutions. These challenges often intensify during periods of organisational change, where aligning personal values with institutional demands becomes increasingly complex. Gendered expectations—varied by contexts—to enact continuities by drawing on personal values of care, collaboration, and relational leadership exacerbate these challenges. Consequently, these women often perform significant emotional and invisible labour to support staff amid change.

This study adopts an intersectional feminist lens to explore the lived experiences of women middle managers in three modern universities in Australia, Nigeria, and the UK. Using a case study design, it employs semi-structured interviews and thematic narrative analysis for an in-depth exploration of the complex, context-specific experiences of these women. The research seeks to critically examine how gendered expectations, power relations, and institutional cultures shape women's everyday experiences of leadership and change. It will also explore how women middle managers in these universities navigate uncertainty, adapt to new structures, and negotiate their experiences by either coping or resisting. The study will highlight what the roles of support networks, leadership practices, and individual agency are in shaping the women's responses.

By critiquing institutional practices and policy, this study highlights power dynamics within universities and uncovers the ways in which these influence the experiences and career trajectories of women middle managers in universities. The findings will identify strategies that these women use to navigate the pressures from change events and processes and how these experiences contribute to or hinder their leadership roles as women in middle management. It has practical implications for universities in terms of employee well-being, fostering resilience, and change management.

The Colonial Machine: Financial Abuse, Social Death, and Barriers to Decolonial Praxis in Contemporary Work

Sophia Saini

(Plutonian Consulting)

This presentation examines how the colonial matrix of power inherently structures workplace relations as sites of financial abuse, creating fundamental barriers to achieving the autonomy necessary for decolonial praxis. Drawing connections between Mario Savio's speech of institutional dehumanisation in "The Operation of the Machine" (1964) and John Trudell's distinction between the "Halluci Nation" and "Alie Nation," I demonstrate how contemporary employment hierarchies perpetuate colonial logics that began with the social death imposed on Black and Brown peoples through chattel slavery.

Through a methodological approach combining auto-ethnography and ethnographic research, I reveal how workplace structures across industries and regions continue to transform workers into what Savio described as "raw materials" for institutional machinery that academics cannot extricate themselves from. I argue that the employee-employer relationship under capitalism cannot be fundamentally reformed without addressing its origin in coloniality that require the subjugation and financial dependency of workers. As Trudell articulates, these structures maintain an "Alie Nation" - populations disconnected from reality through colonial mindsets that normalise exploitation.

I will show that financial dependency functions as the primary barrier to achieving the autonomy necessary for meaningful decolonial work. The imperative to maintain employment for survival creates

a practical impossibility for most workers to engage in decolonial praxis that would threaten their precarious position within capitalist hierarchies. This contradiction reveals how white supremacist patriarchal capitalist culture operates cyclically to prevent its own dismantling.

I will conclude by examining how understanding our collective lived experiences as workers within these colonial continuities can create possibilities for solidarity and resistance from the bottom. By recognising the historical throughlines from chattel slavery to contemporary employment structures, we can better identify and challenge the persistent logics of exploitation that position some bodies as deserving of dignity and others as expendable resources. This recognition is an essential first step toward creating the conditions where decolonial praxis becomes possible within and against colonial work regimes.

(Dis)Continuities in Professions, Occupations & Skills – Room 3.210

The Middlemen of Projectification: The Role of Consulting Firms in State Funded Competitive Programmes

Alexandre Silva, Paula Urze, João Braga Lopes

(Iscte-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa é uma Universidade Portuguesa)

This paper aims to present the main results of an investigation about work control mechanisms in project settings, which is part of the broader PROWORK project - Projectifying work: network organisation models in contemporary capitalist societies - which analyses modes and processes of work projectification (Kuura, 2020; Lundin et al., 2015). As part of PROWORK, this investigation seeks to understand how forms of external monitoring and control of work interplay with internalised forms of control that rely on self-responsibilization and self-discipline and which are part of the work ethos of knowledge workers in project settings.

Control and supervision of labor in flexible work arrangements differs significantly from the standard structures that characterized the fordist organisation (Jessop, 1992). Flexible hours, location, autonomy, and a shift toward self-management are replacing traditional supervision methods like direct oversight and fixed schedules (Bureau & Corsani, 2016). For knowledge workers, this shift—where individuals manage their work—paradoxically often leads to greater work intensification (Pérez-Zapata et al., 2016). Project-based work, in particular, poses challenges due to fixed time constraints and goal-oriented work with varying intensities. This study focuses on the consulting firms' role in developing processes and technologies for measuring productivity. The objective is to understand how these forms of external monitoring and control of work interplay with internalised forms of control that rely on self-responsibilization and self-discipline and which are part of the work ethos of knowledge workers in project settings.

The methodological framework combines semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and observations of key moments in project organization, applied to two case studies. These case studies involve distinct projects in which various organizations collaborate to develop technological solutions, with consulting agencies participating either as direct project partners or as subcontracted service providers to the project partners. Fieldwork was initiated in the summer of 2024 and shall end in march 2025, and includes interviews with heads of organizations, project leaders and professionals.

Findings suggest consulting companies have positioned themselves at a pivotal role between public funding agencies and private sector enterprises, acting as the 'middlemen' of projectification. Government agencies managing European funds rely on consulting firms to disseminate a homogeneous application and reporting language, facilitating evaluation; leading project partners use the consulting firms to legitimize and enforce reporting requirements among all partners; and all partners rely on consulting firms to voice concerns to funding agencies, since the involvement of those firms in many projects provides leverage in negotiations. Additionally, while the reporting language and requirements are shaped by bureaucratic criteria for objective measurement, work standards are often justified by terminology aligned with autonomy and creativity (Florida, 2002).

These findings advance the discussion on the ambivalence of control mechanisms that depend on the contrasting logics of bureaucratic rationalisation and projectified flexibility (Kalff, 2017). Furthermore, the study highlights the role of funding agencies in influencing the design and implementation of labour control mechanisms.

The Reflexive Expert and Their Potential for Politicisation

Cara Reed

(Cardiff University, Cardiff Business School)

Recognition that experts and their expertise is needed now more than ever in order to tackle the range of global challenges before us has brought the expert into the spotlight, examining the basis on which they make their claims to expert status and their relations with others that may rely on that expertise. With this, assumptions regarding who is the expert are problematised, how relations between experts and others are leveraged to enable action is examined more closely, whilst the rise of alternative experts is also established.

Recent work theorising the authority of experts (Reed and Reed 2022; 2023) has highlighted the range of narratives that have emerged suggesting that the traditional model of expert as independent authority with a relationship of deference between them, the state, and the public, is on the demise. As a result, a reconceptualisation of expert is needed to account for the continued but altered role experts may play. Reflexive expert authority (Reed and Reed 2022; 2023) is posited with a notion of expert and expertise as more open, diverse, dialogical, contested, and flexible to challenge. It assumes active trust between experts and others will need to be maintained rather than trust in the expert presumed, based on rational-legal authority. Whilst this provides a far more participatory basis on which expert authority can be realised, it is also more unstable and negotiated and tenuous for the expert.

Building on this theorisation and reconceptualisation, this paper examines how the expert and in particular their relations with the government during times of crisis can reconfigure their expert status. In particular, it provides discursive analysis of the interviews and documentation from the UK's current Covid-19 Public Inquiry that has centred on how experts and politicians inter-related with one another and the degree to which their expert advice was utilised when it came to government decision making.

The research demonstrates the complex inter-relationships between experts and politicians (and the public) that emerge when the expert attempts to engage with others in a more participatory fashion in order to realise action based on their expertise and authority. These inter-relations serve to either re-legitimate the expert as an independent authority to advise the state on key matters or politicise the expert as co-opted or even colonised by the political realm.

Ultimately, what the research indicates is that whilst a more dialogical relationship between experts and other stakeholders is going to be required "under the conditions of extreme decision-making uncertainty and high-risk environments prevailing under late modernity" (Reed and Reed 2022: 11); to meet the needs of reflexive expert authority, the relationship that ensues still bears a lot of risk for the expert concerned.

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(In)Decent Work & Employment – Room 2.217

Engaging with the 'Realms of Possibility': How Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) Can Take a Strength-based Approach to Parental Leave and Work-Family Reconciliation

Helen Norman, Emma Banister, Bianca Stumbitz, Clarice Santos, Laura Jarvis-King, Amy Burnett

(University of Leeds)

Parental leave is high on the UK policy agenda and important for supporting parental employment, child well-being and gender equality. Some elements of UK leave (notably maternity) are generous in length, yet all types (maternity/paternity/adoption/shared parental leave) attract low rates/periods of statutory pay, with employers left to decide on whether they enhance remaining entitlements.

There has been considerable progress by some larger employers, with respect to extended parental leave and pay. However, evidence suggests small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (comprising 1-249 employees) often struggle to financially support enhanced parental leave. They also lag in recognising the challenges parents face, and the promotion of 'family- friendly' options.

Understanding and addressing challenges in managing the transition to parenthood in SMEs is critical given they account for 99.9% of the UK business population, three-fifths of employment and around half the private sector turnover. Yet little is known about the processes of managing this, and its effect on work-family reconciliation for SME employees.

In view of this conundrum, we ask: What are the challenges and opportunities experienced by SMEs and their employees in relation to parental leave? Specifically, we seek to discover other ways SMEs support their employees during this transitional phase, and how this is experienced by employees?

Our paper is based on a wider, multidisciplinary exploration into the management of, and experiences with, maternity/paternity within UK SMEs, funded by the ESRC's Transforming Working Lives call. We draw on qualitative interviews with 32 employers and 35 employees, repeated at two time points over a 12-month period. Interviews were carried out with employees currently expecting a child, or who have at least one child under five, and employers with HR responsibilities (e.g. CEO owner-manager in an SME).

We focus on the 'mutual adjustments' made within SMEs as they relate to the leave period/entitlements (Stumbitz et al., 2018). This encompasses how employers and employees accommodate, adapt and potentially struggle to develop working practices and employment relationships. Our findings show that employers felt constrained in their ability to support employees due to resource scarcity, with key concerns including managing staff absences. However, we identify innovative practices around multiskilling and buddy systems which respond to challenges covering roles like-for-like for limited time periods as well as more tailored solutions fitting the unique circumstances of workplaces/employees. Employee concerns pointed to a need for open dialogue, moving discussion beyond leave entitlement to meet concerns around the boundaries of contact during leave (e.g. clean break/maintaining contact), as well as changing needs after the return to work.

Underpinning employer and employee experiences is the need for supportive workplace cultures, allowing the development of trust so both parties can work together to develop appropriate/preferred flexible approaches in response to changing needs in (early) parenting journeys. We put forward the notion of the 'realms of possibility' in encouragement to SME employers and employees to engage creatively around potential low-/no-cost types of support. This reflects a strength-based approach to parenting journeys that recognises the uniqueness and opportunities for SMEs and employees during this transition

Prophecy Unfulfilled: Reproduction of Value-Action Link as a Social and Organizational Process

Shidong Yang

(Renmin University of China)

Value-action chain is a presumption that attributes individuals' behaviors to their own values. But why are values still perceived as determinants of individual action, despite the evidence otherwise when people try to interpret their situations in everyday life? This article examines the prevalence of the value-action causal link across institutions by demonstrating how this causal attribution is misrecognized and reproduced by actors within an organizational context of direct-selling industry, drawing on scholarship from organizational attributions and performativity literature.

Establishing dominant causal attributions is an important strategy employed by organizations in maintaining legitimacy, yet one far less learned about compared to the rich insight provided by extant scholarship into organizational manipulation of cognition. Although it is found that organizational

members employ similar causal schemata to explain performance in work settings, only recently has attribution been examined as a social process within institutionalized contexts. Unlike other forms of manipulating cognition in the modern-day workplace like consent (Burawoy 1979) or emotional state (Hochschild 1983), which is more prescriptive or normative rather than logical, causal attributions entail factual judgements about causal sequences leading to certain outcomes. Thus, the tension between causal attributions and social reality is the fiercest when compared to other forms of cognitive control, which constitutes uncertainties inherent in their persistence.

A suspended causality framework is proposed to capture the nuanced relationship between organizational attributions and social reality, that is, neither realized or fulfilled, nor totally refuted as false. By examining how female distributors of a global direct-selling enterprise account for their career success and failure, this article demonstrates how "values" are understood as an imagined entity and reduced to moral accusations of those who fail. As the dominant organizational attribution, the value-action causal link performatively shapes the reality towards its own reinforcement, though not in the causal sequences it assumes. Yet, the misalignment between the dominant attribution and reality is manipulated and reinterpreted within the organization through "cognitive realigning", so that the dominant attribution remains unchallenged despite being false; this misalignment is not only masked to performatively preclude contradictions, but can also be further manipulated by organizations to drive more people into this system for it to function and perpetuate. The findings shed light on the uncertain yet complicit nature of symbolic domination underpinning direct-selling as a precarious industry.

The Study of Job Quality in a Hyper-flexible Labour Market: Conceptual and Empirical Challenges

Christophe Vanroelen

(Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussels Institute for Social and Population Studies)

In research on job quality, there is consensus about the multidimensional nature of work's impact on the health, well-being, and functioning of workers. Factors determining job quality are not only related to the content of work tasks and the associated working conditions, but employment conditions and relations also play a significant role. However, insights on the effects of the different dimensions of job quality still mainly come from research on (permanent) employees and do not consider new forms of em-ployment. Today, it can be argued that we have reached a second wave of flexibilisation - or 'hyper-flexibilisation'. Since the COVID pandemic, many workers made a radical shift to place- and time-independent work. We also see the growth of new labour models such as freelance work, platform work, student work, flexijobs, on-call contracts and posting of foreign workers. After giving an overview of these phenomena including data from European countries, the challenges for measuring job quality associated with these new ways of working are discussed.

In line with the multidimensional model of job quality, we identify seven key challenges in conceptualizing and measuring job quality. We argue that new forms of work require innovative approaches to accessing research populations and designing surveys and fieldwork. A second major challenge is defining the research unit: what constitutes a "job" when employment relationships are not formalized by a contract? Similarly, measuring economic viability and stability becomes complex when short-term tasks, multiple clients, and diverse income sources are combined.

Fourth, time-related dimensions also pose difficulties, including definitions of working hours, scheduling, and autonomy, which intersect with broader concepts like freedom and control. Fifth, perceptions of colleagues and supervisors, social relationships, interpersonal conflicts, and workplace support are evolving and might not be appropriately addressed in traditional job quality research. This, as a sixth set of challenges, also raises questions about alternative forms of worker participation and collective representation. Lastly, we discuss the assessment of health risks and workplace prevention strategies in this new types of employment arrangements. To conclude, a potential research agenda will be discussed.

Labour Agency, Trade Unions & Social Movements 1 – Room 3.211

What Happens to Transnational Labour Alliances after Campaigns Succeed or Fail?

Demet Sahende Dinler

(University of Sussex)

Transnational labour alliances receive greater attention in the literature and their conditions of success and failure as well as their specific features and evolution are documented and theorised. However, there is less knowledge on what happens to such alliances after the end of the campaigns. In this paper I am exploring the afterlives of alliances by examining in detail a campaign in the global logistics industry in which I was myself involved as a strategic researcher and campaign coordinator working with workers, union officers and various national and transnational allies of the campaign. Building on the coordination and context appropriate power theory by Marissa Brookes on transnational labour alliances with its strengths and limitations, I argue that analysing the power relations within unions, between the unions, workers and employers is essential to grasp whether some of the values, gains and relationships established during the campaign are enduring or not. I also discuss the various levels of accountabilities between different members of a transnational labour alliance and legacies they leave as an important area of research which can inform the future of global labour campaigns. The paper uses both research data on transnational labour alliances and participant observation data to offer insights weaving historical and ethnographic, macro and micro-scale perspectives.

Not the Epicenter of World Labour Unrest? Conflict in China's Automotive Industry Since 2010

Frido Wenten, Miao Tian, Daniel Fuchs

(Humboldt University of Berlin)

Extrapolating from her observations for the 20th century, Beverly Silver hypothesised in 2003 that "we have good reasons to expect the emergence of strong, independent autoworkers' movements in Mexico and China during the coming decade [2010-2020]" (Silver 2003: 65), transforming China into the "epicentre of world labor unrest" (Silver/Zhang 2009: 174). We take the conclusion of said decade as an opportunity to ask to what extent and why such predictions for the car industry and its workers in China have come to pass. Embracing Silver's own argument on the importance of the "product cycle" and drawing on a combined 28 months of fieldwork and over 150 interviews we argue that beyond political adversity, the formation of a labour movement in China's car industry has been impaired by the maturity of the industry and correspondent managerial strategies to maintain profitability. Concretely, around the year 2015 the industry experienced a slowdown of previously rapid expansion of combustion engine car production in China. The sector did not react with relocation but a shift in product to electric vehicles, linked to the emergence of new, domestic private manufacturers as the driving forces of growth in the sector. This contracted the room for concessions to employees at the large foreign-domestic joint ventures and their suppliers, with unrest taking on a defensive character. The focus on product cycle/industrial maturity helps us to explain the relative stability of labour relations in a situation of segmented internal labour markets and supply chains. It is unlikely that the auto sector will catalyse wider labour unrest, or the formation of a labour movement, in China.

Labour Agency, Trade Unions & Social Movements 2 – Room 3.212

Perceptions of Class Conflict among Platform Food Couriers in Germany and England

Alexandra Seehaus, Vera Trappmann, Mark Stuart

(Leeds University, Leeds University Business School)

This paper investigates how platform food couriers in England and Germany perceive class-related conflicts within their work context (Burawoy 2000, Keefer 2015). The findings show how inequalities in platform jobs are experienced and perceived and how far class presents a relevant frame for platform workers. The paper adds to debates on the organising potential among platform workers (Tassinari & Maccarone 2020, Trappmann et al. 2020, Bessa et al. 2022) and to recent efforts to theorise types of labour unrest in platform work based on underlying reasons and different forms of collective action (Stuart et al. 2024). The paper is based on 40 in-depth biographic interviews with organised and unorganised food couriers in Germany and the UK collected between 2021 and 2023. The rich interview data were analysed using the coding system of the Grounded Theory approach (Glaser 1978). Following the idea of mutual learning circles (Crean 2018), intermediate findings were discussed with a small group of research participants. The paper shows how the specific working conditions in the platform food courier sector are experienced and how and when this experience shapes the workers' perceptions of social inequality and class-related conflicts. It provides nuanced accounts of how typical characteristics of platform courier work like information asymmetry, one-sided flexibility, safety risks, low social and employment protections, and unpaid labour (Rosenblat and Stark 2016, Gregory 2021, Forde et al. 2017, Pulignano et al. 2023) are problematised by the workers. The findings that pay and the lack of transparency are identified as central points of conflict for platform food couriers are in line with prior findings on the reasons for global platform resistance. However, the paper goes deeper by providing in-depth insights into how couriers frame these issues in different contexts. Here, cultural and institutional differences between countries are considered, as well as the social class composition of the workforce, which often defines their tenure, dependency, and thus perspective in the job (Schor et al 2020). The paper argues that despite causing protests, the issues experienced by couriers in Germany and England are unlikely to spark radical criticism and demands for two reasons. First, issues around pay aren't linked to exploitation but are framed as lacking recognition or as a result of bad organisation. Second, exploitation or power imbalances are deemed negligible due to the job's meaning in the worker's biographic trajectory. The paper argues that to understand the potential of platform food couriers to become a new power in the labour movement (Vandaele 2021), it is crucial to understand how workers define the conflicts that they encounter. Their perceptions and framing of issues at work are relevant to the question of whom workers hold accountable for problems (e.g., the state or platform company) and how radical their demands for change are.

Labour Struggles as Lived Citizenship: Precarious Migrant Workers as Agents of Change

Davide Pero, Elisabetta Zontini

(University of Padova)

This paper aims to contribute to the sociological critique of the dominant idea of citizenship by introducing the often-overlooked question of labour conflict into the debate on 'lived citizenship'. This idea creates rigid boundaries of belonging which exclude subjects such as migrant workers as 'non-citizens', restricting their rights. It also creates an illusory sense of equality among the in-group members of the state ('citizens' with full formal rights) when sharp differentiations and inequalities in accessing rights with regard to gender, race, sexuality, and class exist among them (Anderson 2021; Erel et al. 2017). In contrast to this idea, in this paper we adopt a 'lived citizenship' approach to examine the contentious labour practices of migrant workers organised through grassroots independent unions in London. This approach entails considering citizenship as something experienced, performed and/or negotiated by social actors (rather than fixed and ascribed by state institutions), paying attention to its spatial, intersubjective, performative, and affective dimensions. Considering contentious labour initiatives in this way is important as the lived citizenship scholarship in its examinations of new rights that migrant negotiate (which include civil, political, social, cultural, ecological and sexual rights) has overlooked those of class. This will be done by examining how the contentious labour practices of precarious migrant workers (observed ethnographically in London) can contribute to these workers' (lived) citizenship.

The paper draws on ethnographic research conducted in London with migrant workers from independent grassroots labour formations co-led by migrants – 'indie unions' – such IWGB, UVW and CAIWU. The paper shows how the intersectional and participatory labour organizing of these workers – and in particular their communities of struggle – can improve not only their working and living conditions but also transform their political subjectivity and enhance their sense of belonging as well as challenging taken from granted (exclusionary) practices and thus promoting socio-economic justice. By creatively drawing on their marginalised position at the intersection of different systems of power

(Collins 2019), these migrant workers and their unions were able to develop new ways of enacting citizenship and in so doing re-imagine what is possible (hooks 1990; Anzaldua 1987), leading campaigns against outsourcing and exploitation in the gig economy and inspiring changes in the tactics of the British labour movement. Through this discussion the paper argues for including grassroots redistributive initiatives in citizenship analysis foregrounding conflict. The paper also exposes the inconsistency of ideas about migrant workers' integration into an unequal, exploitative, and marginalising status quo.

Continuities and Discontinuities in UK Strike Patterns and in UK Strike Statistics

Dave Lyddon

(Keele University)

The pattern of UK strike activity over time shows important continuities but also major discontinuities, mainly reflecting long-term changes in employment, unionization, and industrial-relations flashpoints. Strike activity was charted through consistent official data collection and publication arrangements from the 1890s to the 1990s. These were then moved from a government department, concerned with industrial relations, to the Office for National Statistics (ONS). From then the statistical representation of strikes started to deteriorate and the post-pandemic output is seriously compromised.

This paper charts the long-term changes, using the Labour Disputes Survey/Inquiry data set in the absence of any authoritative alternative. It is informed by a conflict (class struggle) perspective that strikes are an inevitable consequence of the irreconcilable conflict of interest between employers and workers under capitalism. But it recognizes that strikes are not purely expressions of resistance but also the continuation of collective bargaining (broadly defined) by other means. It also affords a limited role for the periodic legal restrictions on striking, arguing that at critical points economic factors tend to outweigh legal ones.

UK strikes have expanded their locus, from their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century origins in manual trades, being dominated in the twentieth century by coal mining and then manufacturing (particularly engineering and related industries). They spread to white-collar (non-manual) occupations from about the 1960s and, much more recently, among professionally-qualified employees under the intertwined effects of deindustrialization and the 'tertiarization' of conflict.

Historically, strike waves (often caused by inflationary pressures) have erupted on top of an ongoing bedrock of conflict. The shift, starting in the mid-1930s, to predominantly 'unofficial' strikes was shattered in the 1980s' decade of 'class struggle from above'. Their collapse, under mass unemployment, closures, and militant employer tactics, predates the unlawfulness of such action. The now predominantly 'official' nature of strikes, with their statutory balloting paraphernalia, has been accompanied very recently by a huge expansion in strike pay – not seen for nearly a century. At the same time, most strikes remain single workplace and single union, as ever. Sectionalism is rife, even in the 2022–23 strike surge.

Despite limitations, the statistical representation of UK strikes was reasonably consistent for most of the twentieth century, allowing commentators to identify long-term and short-term trends. This changed when the Department for Employment was abolished in 1995 and the ONS took over the Labour Disputes Survey/Inquiry, with an emphasis more aligned to purely statistical considerations.

This saw the ending, after 2001, of even anonymized information on strikes resulting in 5,000 working days 'lost' – removing an important source of detail on larger and longer strikes. Attempts to shut the Labour Disputes Survey were foiled in 2002 and 2014. Collection stopped in 2020–21. When restarted, not only were annual summaries ended, losing data on strike cause, duration and size, but the definition of a 'stoppage' had been radically changed, rendering longitudinal comparisons seriously compromised.

Open Stream – Room 2.218

Winning Some, Losing More: Decoding a Pseudo-event in the Chinese Higher Education System

Chao Ren

(University of New South Wales Canberra)

This study examines workplace inequalities in Chinese universities under the dual-track performance measurement system (PMS). Drawing on Alain Badiou's event theory, this article analyses whether and how the dual-track PMS constitutes an 'event', a transformative rupture, or a 'pseudo-event' that sustains existing power structures while engaging with Marxist discourse on transition. The findings suggest that while the dual-track PMS initially emerged as a radical event to disrupt entrenched capitalist and hierarchical norms, promoting meritocracy, equality, and academic freedom, its institutionalisation was absorbed by vested interests, power dynamics, and broader socio-political structures. This reduced it into a politico-bureaucratic PMS that consolidates, rather than challenges the status quo. The study demonstrates how the truth of the founding event is betrayed, displaced, and obscured through the institutionalisation. This eventual institutionalisation underscores the role of management accounting in perpetuating inequality and highlights the socialist governance in China maintains existing power structures. The study contributes to understanding how workplace inequality is reproduced in Chinese academia and explores how the deepening of reforms mediates power relations.

Japanese Public Childcare Teachers' Experiences in Crafting the Market: Increasing Workload and Weakening Bargaining Power

Kumiko Hagiwara

(Momoyama Gakuin University)

Since the 1980s, numerous countries have implemented reforms in childcare services, incorporating market mechanisms and contractual frameworks into provision of care. The concept of 'early childhood education and care' has been influenced by economic conceptual frameworks and perspectives with indicators of developmental outcomes based on economics and neuroscience (OECD, 2011). Childcare and young children have become part of the marketised discourse of investment and high return (Moss et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the social services market has been characterised by problems and risks, such as 'externalities, information asymmetries, and incomplete contracts' (Gingrich 2011), a decline in service quality, and inequality (Lloyd & Penn, 2012; Gallagher, 2019; Vandenbroeck et al., 2023).

Beyond the relationships of demand, consumers, and supply or the management side, Vogel (2018) conceptualised the term marketisation as state action that reconfigures policy architecture to build a new institution that pervades market logic. The market is social institutions, and governments must work with existing policies and sectors.

Inspired by Vogel's conceptual framework, this study examined the Japanese marketisation of the childcare sector and explored how governments deal with political processes that counteract social forces through budgets and policies. Marketisation experiences were examined drawing on two data types: a questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews with public nursery-school teachers who also served as labour union officers and shop stewards.

The marketisation of the childcare sector in Japan reached a significant milestone with the 2015 Comprehensive Support System for Children and Child-rearing (CSSCC). This new system transformed public funds from the supply side to the demand side or market-driven model. In crafting the market which did not exist formally before, public-run childcare centres were drastically reduced through budget measures that gave preference to private-run institutions. Although not well documented in international texts, public childcare centres in Japan were established since 1948 based on the principles of public responsibility and the guarantee of universal child rights under the law; the centres have been the organisational foundations for the trade union of Japan's most substantial childcare workforce.

The survey and interviews focused on working conditions, workload, union activities, support for trade unions, and policy-making involvement. Respondents reported that the reduction in full-time staff and the concomitant increase in part-time staff resulted in increased workloads and longer working hours.

They also reported shortages of time for union activities and reduced support for unions in the workplace. Respondents expressed feelings of distress. The state-led marketisation was interpreted as a strategic move to deplete the political and social bargaining power of childcare teachers, predominantly female professionals, effectively converting them into a mere workforce for childcare without voice.

This Japanese case study exemplified market-crafting in which the state plays a pivotal role. It highlighted the challenges associated with the social-services market and demonstrated how the foundations of democratic opposition to risks posed by the market system have been eroded. Further research is required to ascertain the strategies by which the state disarms opposing forces.

Unseen, Uncounted, Unprotected: The Classification Struggles of Performing Art Workers in Italy

Francesco Eugenio Iannuzzi, Maria Dodaro

(Ca' Foscari University of Venice, University of Padua)

In capitalist welfare regimes, social protection has developed in close connection with the consolidation of standardised industrial employment. Stable, continuous and full-time waged work has historically functioned as the reference model around which access to social rights has been organised. This model has shaped the socio-institutional architecture of welfare systems, including the cognitive and normative categories through which work activity is recognised, classified and valued. In the current context of labour market fragmentation, traditional classificatory frameworks appear increasingly inadequate to capture the heterogeneity of work and the lived experiences of workers. As a result, they contribute to new forms of invisibility and exclusion, reshaping the boundaries of social protection and citizenship.

This contribution examines these tensions by focusing on the Italian performing arts sector, where employment is marked by extreme contractual fragmentation, income discontinuity and pervasive precarity. Long considered an exceptional field, the sector now epitomises broader transformations of work, including flexibilisation, individualisation of risk, and the erosion of standard employment. While workers are required to engage in continuous artistic, relational and organisational labour, much of their activity remains unrecognised and unremunerated. Such exclusions are entangled with conventional social policy classifications, which systematically overlook significant portions of the labour actually performed, thereby contributing to structural barriers to protection.

The article investigates how performing arts workers in Italy mobilise to challenge this mismatch. We conceptualise these struggles as "classification struggles" (Bourdieu 1984), understood as political and symbolic conflicts over the categories and metrics that define what is seen and valued as work. This conceptual lens, previously applied to informal labour, migrant workers and welfare claimants (Barron et al. 2016; Gibson-Light 2018; Goldberg 2007; Krinsky 2008), allows us to explore how precarious workers seek recognition not only of their unpaid work but of their very status as workers deserving of rights. Their claims revolve around making visible a form of labour that is intermittent, hybrid, and deeply embedded in collective and creative processes, yet remains largely invisible to dominant social policy frameworks.

Drawing on qualitative research, the article traces how these struggles emerge and unfold. We analyse the structural conditions that have intensified workers' vulnerability in recent decades – such as market expansion, heightened competition, and welfare retrenchment – and explore how these processes have triggered both individual and collective protection strategies. While early responses often took the form of self-managed initiatives (e.g., social cooperatives), the pandemic catalysed a shift towards more organised claims for public social protection, culminating in recent reforms such as the "indennità di discontinuità".

The article argues that these mobilisation efforts are not merely claims for redistribution, but also for epistemic justice: they contest the informational bases of public judgement that systematically exclude certain forms of labour. In doing so, they illuminate the power-laden dynamics at stake in measuring work and producing legitimate worker subjectivities.

Technology & Work – Room 2.220

Unsettling Failures of Qualification: A Pragmatic Sociology View on Uber Drivers' Everyday Engagements with Algorithmic Management

Salman Khan

(Durham University)

The rise of on-demand digital platforms in recent years has significantly transformed the way in which work is organised, and evaluated, in various domains of economic life. Among the socioeconomic spaces most affected by this transformation is the taxicab trade, which has seen the rapid rise of Uber, Bolt and other gig economy operators over the past decade. Previous work has highlighted how Uber drivers are subject to opaque algorithmic mechanisms that govern key aspects of their work activity, including, notably, 'dynamic pricing' and the ratings system (Rosenblat, 2018; Chan, 2019). Scholars have drawn attention to the myriad ways in which these opaque algorithmic mechanisms become coupled with dynamics of consent and contestation in the platform economy (Purcell and Brook, 2022; Schor et al., 2024), as well as how the uncertainty borne of these mechanisms leads to the formation and mobilisation of subjective understandings or 'stories' on part of platform workers, which ultimately fail to uphold the figure of the entrepreneurial or 'choosing self' they seek to align themselves with (Gregory and Sadowski, 2021; Gregory, 2021).

Others, like del Nido (2021a; 2021b), have focused on the normative underpinnings of Uber's algorithmic mechanisms, stressing the importance of certain 'gladitorial truths' that help legitimise it in the eyes of state regulators and various publics, thereby solidifying 'societal coalitions' that support platforms over platform workers in the public sphere (Stark and Pais, 2021). In this paper, I take this stream of research further by bringing forth certain insights from an ethnographic study based in North East England on Uber drivers' everyday interactions with the algorithms that manage their work activity, focusing in particular on three key aspects: 'dynamic pricing'; job allocations ['matching']; and the commission charged by the company, which represents a nascent form of 'rentiership' employed by the platform (Birch, 2020). Drawing on a pragmatic sociology lens, and in tandem with participants' accounts, I examine how these interactions involve attempts to qualify as worthy actors in terms of two 'orders of worth' that shape their work relations: the market order, and the more contemporary connexionist order (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). Owing to downward pressure on fares from broader market dynamics on one end, and information asymmetries inherent in these interactions on the other (Rosenblat and Stark, 2016), such attempts at worthy qualifications often result in failure. The affectively disorientating nature of such 'failures of qualification' leads drivers to minimise active investment in the normative logics governing key aspects of their work activity. At the same time, they reach beyond the realm of their work relations to devise different compromises that can justify continued engagement in the work activity: for example, worth drawn from family life that offsets an insufficiency of money [market worth]; life projects set in motion by migration; among others. In bringing forth these insights, the paper demonstrates the value of adopting a pragmatic sociology approach to the study of platform work – one that situates it in the wider context of shifting 'orders of worth'.

Migration, Algorithmic Governance, Solidarity and Resistance in the Gig Economy

Lutfun Nahar Lata

(University of Melbourne)

This paper explores how migrant gig workers in Melbourne exercise agency to earn and sustain their livelihoods. Migrant gig workers do not only experience extortion by digital labour platforms such as Uber, DoorDash and Hungry Panda, but they also face various challenges, such as precarious working conditions due to their visa status and algorithmic control of their activities. All these factors constrain migrant gig workers' autonomy and bargaining power. Consequently, migrant gig workers have fewer opportunities to exercise their agency. Within this context, drawing on in-depth interviews with 39 food delivery workers, 18 ridesharing drivers, seven government and non-government stakeholders, this paper contributes to the literature on migration, digital labour platforms and resistance showing how migrant gig workers are able to utilise both covert and overt resistance strategies to protest platforms' exploitative mechanisms.

Digitally Mediated Platform Sweatshop: Food Delivery Workers in India

Debdulal Saha

(Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Mohali)

This article analyses digitally mediated sweatshop in the platform economy. Drawing from life stories and in-depth interviews with food delivery platform workers from four cities in India— Chandigarh, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Mumbai, the article shows how sweatshop is constructed through everyday employment opportunities through digital labour platforms. Digital platforms for the delivery services function by relying on a large quantum of low-skilled workforce to complete and execute the specific task of the supply chain activity, making a class of themselves who are expected to bear the cost by taking financial, operational and labour risks. This raises the binary question of whether these partners or workers. Partnership spirit is diluted by not participating in any of the decision-making, including their mode of work, rather following instructions of the digital platforms, resembling a factory worker. Food delivery partners are only responsible for delivering food from restaurants to customers on a piece-rated earning system. While labelled as "partners", delivery workers function as risk-bearing platform workers aligning more with exploited labour than business partners.

This article considers these partners as risk-bearing workers created by digital platforms. Bearing the risks in terms of everyday contestations and negotiations over space primarily with different stakeholders including civic authorities, restaurants and customers, these workers are platform-induced precariat and work as outworkers of these digital platforms. Providing plenty of non-committal work opportunities with much flexibility, the platforms create digitally mediated sweatshops by fragmentations and outsourcing tasks. Expanding Mezzadri's (2017) sweatshop analysis, which was beyond the confines of factories to include home-based labour and informal networks interacting with the private space, we argue that the platform workers operate and bear the risks by interacting with both private and public space. While in traditional settings, the hardship of sweatshops or back-of-house workers was hidden from consumers, the precarity and insecurity of labour are not only overtly displayed in urban public spaces. Still, they are also normalised through digital mediation in the platform economy. This challenges us to rethink how modern capitalism uses digital and spatial reconfigurations to expose and obscure labour's true conditions.

In the digital sweatshop workspace, the traditional assembly line is both virtualized and spatialised. Delivery app algorithms now function as algorithmic foremen by breaking labour into discrete tasks (pickup, transit, delivery) and dispersing them across urban geographies. The crowded spaces outside restaurants or dark stores mirror the loading docks of traditional sweatshops, where workers hustle under intense time pressure. Here, the "piece-rate" logic where wages depend on the number of units completed is replicated through platform incentive models, forcing workers to internalise their exploitation. The delivery gig economy does not mark a rupture from industrial capitalism but rather its logical evolution into "a sweatshop without walls". This digital sweatshop phenomenon has transformed the structural analysis of sweatshops, giving rise to platform-mediated work arrangements that lack job stability. They have restructured the market by creating one-day employment with zero-hour job contracts. Employment is not guaranteed, and demand-driven algorithms determine shifts.

Work/place Alienation, Voice & Participation 1 – Room 2.219

PhD Showcase

Moving on from the Lonely Person to the Lonely Workplace: A Qualitative Study of Interpersonal and Contextual Dynamics that Foster Loneliness at Work

Franziska Steiner

(Hanken School of Economics)

Loneliness exists wherever people exist and often becomes most pronounced in the company of others. Today, many employees feel lonely at work, with negative consequences for their health and wellbeing. Several discontinuities contribute to this trend. Remote and hybrid work modes and virtual communication, increasing automation and gig work, and changes in team design towards more fluid,

flexible, and short-term assignments are all making loneliness an increasingly systemic, structural, and, indeed, home-made challenge for organisations. Because of this, people do not only experience loneliness outside of work. They also experience loneliness at work and because of work.

This paper contributes to the budding research about loneliness at work. I propose to shift the focus away from the individual attributes and behaviours of "the lonely individual", as common in psychologically oriented research so far, and towards the interpersonal and contextual aspects of workplaces that create the conditions for loneliness to emerge. In this presentation, I will present the results of an empirical study that tries to understand the experience of loneliness at work from the perspective of employees which has been underrepresented in studies of workplace loneliness. The study focuses on people that work in a collaborative and interdependent setting which helps to conceptually separate loneliness from social isolation. Based on the analysis of interviews and audio diaries, the participants' accounts reveal dynamics that hinder individuals from forming meaningful relationships at work.

Preliminary findings evolve around interpersonal and contextual dynamics, from lacking opportunities for informal communication and being unable to see the results of one's work to lacking a home base and experiencing relationships as fragmented that undermine employees' ability to connect. I further address the influence of hybrid and remote work and the question why some people manage to develop and maintain sufficient social connection in this context and others do not. I do not conceptualise remote work as a cause of disconnection, but as a risk factor that can intensify the influence of other causes and that affects the opportunities of individuals to experience self-efficacy. This study contributes to the contextualisation of workplace loneliness, recognising the influence of work and the work environment. Considering the dominance of psychological perspectives and of quantitative approaches to studying loneliness at work, I am arguing that different perspectives and approaches not only enable acknowledging the interpersonal and contextual dynamics that lead to loneliness, it also changes our understanding of what loneliness at work is and who is experiencing it.

I have completed the first round of data collection with 19 participants from two European organisations, a professional service firm and a government agency, and I am conducting the second round with additional 10 to 20 participants during the spring of 2025. In my presentation, I will present findings and suggestions for theoretical contributions and I am looking forward to discussing suitable theoretical frameworks.

Social Movements' Contribution to Discontinuities in Hegemonic Work, Life and Occupation

Eurig Scandrett, Maria Giatsi Clausen

(Queen Margaret University)

This paper examines how hegemonic forces shape the meaning of everyday activities that are experienced as meaningful yet reinforce alienation. The concept of "hegemonic occupation" highlights how dominant societal ideologies, particularly under capitalism, define certain activities or occupations as valuable while disconnecting individuals from their labour and its purpose. The historical separation of "work" from "life" in early capitalism has normalized this alienation, especially for marginalized groups, in the interests of the powerful. Social movements challenge these norms, promoting counter-hegemonic practices that foster creativity, self-determination, and liberation. Occupational Therapy emerged from such counter-hegemonic practices in Jane Addam's Hull House public sociology project, before being professionalized in association with the medical profession and orientated towards rehabilitation.

Drawing from the dialogue between this thesis and social movements (case studies) based on Burawoy's extended case method, which took place during the writing of an upcoming book, the paper explores and discusses the themes of meaningful alienation and contested occupation through, for example: a. the role of trade unions, especially in the gig and surveillance economy, in addressing the need to go beyond merely defending work-life, into fighting for meaningful work beyond economic productivity; b. volunteerism, focusing on the experiences of people with lived experiene of mental illness and the coercion of paid employment; c. the feminist movement's challenge to 'gendered jobs' and the division of domestic labour; d, disabled people's movement's use of arts to challenge professionals' insistence on normalization; e, the Mad Studies academic discipline and activism, and illuminating the mental distress resulting from the loss of meaningfulness and exploitative, colonising economic logic; f. decentralising formal, conventional education, proposing community-driven models

where children and the youth shape and control their own learning and create spaces for social engagement and democratic participation; g, the everyday practices of Palestinian farmers as a form of resistance to Zionist colonization. Following Raymond Williams these movements constitute emergent selections from social practice to contest meaningfulness in work and occupation.

The paper concludes with key discussion points around the importance of distinguishing between activities that sustain existing social structures and those that contribute to emancipatory praxis. The authors argue how the concept of labour enables the analysis of occupations as sites of both alienation and potential transformation. Drawing on social movement theory and historical dialectical materialism, the authors finally argue that participation in counter-hegemonic occupations enables individuals and groups to challenge systems of oppression, and develop radical needs that transcend capitalist structures.

Fleeting Belonging and the Precarity of Live-in Domestic Child Labor: Continuities and Discontinuities in Informal Work in Pakistan

Rahla Rahat

(University of the Punjab)

A large number of children work as live-in domestic workers in Pakistani homes despite child labor being illegal. These children often move between households and cities, with limited and controlled contact with their families. This absence of stable social networks, coupled with residential instability, often exposes them to violence and exploitation, leaving them without a sustainable safety net. This paper examines the lived experiences of such children, exploring how constant uprooting—resulting in a persistent state of unfamiliarity and transience—may further lead to what Vanessa May (2013) terms "fleeting belonging," a temporary and tenuous sense of connection that is repeatedly disrupted by movement, instability, and exclusion. The lack of social networks and secure spaces prevents these young workers from forming a lasting sense of belonging—a sustained attachment to people, places, and institutions that provide security and identity (May, 2013; Yuval-Davis, 2011).

This qualitative study draws on in-depth interviews with 30 young women in Lahore, Pakistan, who worked as live-in domestic workers in at least three households during their childhood. Using thematic analysis, the study finds that constant mobility, job insecurity, and unstable work conditions hinder children's ability to build meaningful relationships and cultivate belonging. Their lack of relational stability deepens marginalization and reinforces socio-economic precarity. Furthermore, their disconnection from local geographies, services, and institutions exacerbates their invisibility, limiting access to formal and informal support. This heightens their vulnerability to exploitation while precluding them from essential social and legal protections.

This paper situates live-in domestic child labor within broader discussions on continuities and discontinuities in work and employment, highlighting how informal child labor persists despite legal prohibitions and sustains cycles of exploitation and precarity. While employment in domestic work appears continuous, the instability and transience of these young workers' lives create a fundamental discontinuity in their access to rights, protections, and long-term socio-economic mobility. Addressing these challenges requires immediate policy interventions and broader structural reforms that recognize the intersection of informality, mobility, and social exclusion. This study contributes to debates on labor precarity and the sociology of work, demonstrating how the failure to enforce legal protections in informal labor settings exacerbates structural inequalities rather than fostering social transformation.

Work/place Alienation, Voice & Participation 2 – Room 3.205

Pandemic Burdens: COVID-19's Impact on Women Public Sector Workers and the Dwindling Aspirations of Scotland's Fair Work Framework

Lakshman Wimalasena

(Heriot Watt University)

The Scottish Fair Work Framework (FWF), initiated in 2016, set out with the ambitious goal of fostering world-leading working lives where fair work would drive success, well-being and prosperity. Nearly a decade later, this paper investigates the lived experiences of 22 women workers in a large Scottish public sector organisation through the lens of FWF. The findings compellingly illustrate that the Pandemic has caused irreversible damage to the 'good life' that Scottish FWF aimed to produce. The key fair work principles – effective voice, respect, opportunity, security and fulfilment, as the findings demonstrate, are significantly impacted by the post-Pandemic working conditions. Remote working, a lasting feature of the post-pandemic 'new normal' working conditions, has emerged as a double-edged sword. While participants embrace the work-life balance flexibility that working from home offers, they are conscious of its negative impact on their broader working experience and career progression. These lower-level public sector female employees seem to be stagnant in feminised occupations, falling victim to a 'concrete ceiling' effect. Additionally, this study finds that two tiers have been created among this segment of employees, with 'haves' who joined in the pre-Pandemic context with a permanent contract and the 'have-nots' who joined in post-Pandemic context on inevitable 'contract work'. Rising budgetary constraints have subjected this latter group to insecure employment conditions as well as a lack of socio-cultural capital impacting further negatively on effective voice, opportunity and fulfilment aspects of the FWF generating a sense of alienation. This paper therefore emphasises the need for revised management practices that align with post-pandemic socio-occupational contexts to achieve the ambitions of the FWF and to trigger revisions for more inclusive fair work policies.

Gendered Impact of Four Day Working Week

Xuechun Ding

(Newcastle University, Newcastle University Business School)

Over the past few years, a strong trend towards the global trial of Four Day Working Week (4DW) has been evident (Autonomy, 2021; Schor and Fan, 2024). The growing enthusiasm for 4DW may be attributed to its potential multi-faceted benefits, from improved subjective well-being at the individual level (Schor and Fan, 2024), to increased performance at the organisational level (Autonomy, 2023), and to gender equality at the societal level as 4DW may promote men's sharing of caring responsibilities and domestic labour (4 Day Week Global, 2024). However, the quantitative data from the UK and Ireland trials reveals an unchanged pattern in household division of labour (Kelly et al., 2022). A question is then raised as to whether and how 4DW promotes gender equality or merely stabilises gender inequality. Gender issues, along with changes in working time, need to be analysed within a specific historical context, as neither of them are purely objective facts independent of external influences. For example, while women's right to work may be interpreted as resistance to male dominance in the context of a male-breadwinner model, the double burden faced by women in a dual-earner model can lead to women's time poverty and a comparatively lower quality of leisure than men (Bittman and Wajcman, 2000). Changes in working time can also reflect the particularities of each era and the uncertainties of work and employment. While long working hours were a defining feature of factory employment during the Industrial Revolutions, underemployment - characterised by an increasing number of workers preferring longer working hours (Heyes, Tomlinson and Whitworth, 2017) - as well as a high proportion of part-time work among women (Jonsson, 2011), may be considered problematic today. As a seemingly win-win solution, the extent to which 4DW addresses contemporary gender and employment issues needs to be investigated in depth.

Despite all the uncertainties surrounding gender and work, the underlying rationale remains constant: hierarchy and patriarchy. The power asymmetry between employers and employees is examined in Labour Process Theory (LPT), which theorises the persistent exploitation of labour by capital (Braverman, 1998), thereby entrenching a hierarchical structure within the labour market. Beyond the antagonism between these two broad groups, LPT is limited in capturing the varying degrees of exploitation, particularly in relation to gendered patriarchy (Thompson, 1993, p.181). Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) provides a nuanced framework by highlighting the essential role of social reproduction in sustaining capitalist production, with a strong focus on exposing gendered subordination (e.g., Fraser, 2016). A multi-method qualitative study is thus designed based on the integration of LPT and SRT to examine the gendered impact of 4DW. Multiple-case study will be utilised as the main research strategy to explore the similarities and differences in gendered experiences of 4DW between multiple organisations (Baxter and Jack, 2008). This study can address the gap in meso-level examinations of 4DW (Araújo, Rodrigues and Ferreira, 2024) and elaborate on its intersection with work

and society. This study is in the pilot phase, with official organisational visits starting in April, and preliminary data expected for the conference.

The Socialisation of Precarity and Directions for the Future

Panos Theodoropoulos

(King's College London)

Migrant workers in the UK are at the forefront of the precarious condition. However, autonomous instances of migrant worker unionisation remain rare, particularly outside of London. Drawing on 21 formal interviews, hundreds of informal interviews, and a one-year period of covert participant observation in six migrant-dense precarious workplaces in Glasgow, I argue that precarity reaches deep into the recesses of subjectivity and may lead to what I term the 'socialisation of precarity', a complex of dispositions that enforces an individualist, short-term, survivalist identity. The socialisation of precarity can thus be seen as a way for migrant workers to negotiate the uncertainty generated by precarious employment and migration experiences through cultivating persona resilience and strong individualised senses of self. However, this response mechanism further fortifies the inherent pressures of precarity to individualise workers -- paradoxically, one's attempts at empowerment lead to further collective disempowerment. This entails important complications in relation to the issue of collective action and organisation, since the shared experiences of exploitation that are instrumental in the creation of a unified political subjectivity are instead interpreted as difficulties that one's ability to overcome them by surviving through them is the measure of one's self worth and dignity. One's identity as a worker is therefore attached to surviving conditions rather than changing them. While my research is focused exclusively on migrant workers in Glasgow, I argue that the concept of the socialisation of precarity is useful for analysing the wider formation of worker subjectivities under conditions of precarity. It is also a useful framework for understanding the difficulties of contemporary labour organising, and potentially for tracing solutions to overcome them.