



2nd Accommodating Diversity in the Workplace Conference

11th June, London Road Campus, University of Reading and Online

The conference will take place in London Road L22 1.03

Conference Programme

9:30-9.55: Arrival

9:55: Welcome and Introduction

Session 1

10:00-10:40: Maternal well-being, infant feeding and return to paid work, Sarah Jewell, University of Reading

10:40-11:20: Teacher-mothers: the challenges faced when returning from parental leave, Madeline Best, University of Reading

11:20-11:40: Tea and Coffee

Session 2

11:40-12:20: Addressing the class bias in research on the menopause – exploring the lived experiences of menopausal women in the workplace, Samantha Evans, University of Kent

12:20-13:00: A balancing act? A critical exploration of work-family dynamics, Clarice Santos, Middlesex University

13:00-14:00: Lunch

Session 3

14:00-14:40: Racism and sexism are permitted by default: a study of UK Higher Education, Karen Jones, University of Reading

14:40-15:20: Leadership identity construction of middle managers of Russian and Arabic ethnic origin in the context of the Institute Wide Language Programmes, Tanya Linaker, Kings College London

15:20-16:00: Introducing the LGBTQ+ travel tool. An interactive policy development tool. Frances Hamilton, University of Reading

16:00-16:10: Closing Remarks and Close

For more details and how to register [see our conference web page](#).



ACCOMMODATING DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Abstracts

Session 1

Maternal well-being, infant feeding and return to paid work

Sarah Jewell, University of Reading

Past research has shown that not meeting individual breastfeeding goals has a detrimental effect on a mother's well-being, known as breastfeeding grief. One potential barrier for mothers wishing to continue to breastfeed for as long as they and/or their child wants is return to paid work. There is a lack of understanding in the workplace of how best to accommodate and support breastfeeding employees and their well-being. Our study, funded by the Nuffield Foundation explores the well-being, opportunities and lived experiences of new mothers who wish to continue to breastfeed on return to paid work. The research fills a gap in UK knowledge by helping us better understand underpinning societal attitudes, legal frameworks and other obstacles that may shape decisions in this context and to explore the impact of these on the well-being of working mothers. Drawing on insights from our study and primary data collection, we explore how breastfeeding employees can be better supported in the run up to and after return to work. We ran a maternal experiences survey which had over 1800 responses from mothers in the UK who had given birth since 2017. We complemented this with 62 interviews, including those who had continued breastfeeding, those who had stopped and those who had not yet returned to work. We also undertook a survey of HR decision makers (500 responses) across a range of sectors.

Teacher-mothers: the challenges faced when returning from parental leave

Madeline Best, University of Reading

There is a significant recruitment and retention crisis in education: almost 40,000 working-age teachers left the profession in 2022. Women in their 30s are the biggest group of these leavers, with existing research linking this in part to motherhood. However, schools and policymakers are paying relatively little attention to this cohort. Therefore, the aims for this study are to give a voice to teachers who are also mothers to pre-school age children and to make policy recommendations to improve support for this group. This study uses a sequential mixed-methods design. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 15 teacher-mothers initially, then a thematic analysis of this data was used to design a large-scale questionnaire, to which there were 354 valid respondents to the survey, from across the school sector. The study explores how teacher-mothers navigate the return to work from maternity leave and what support, if any, they receive during this time. Findings indicate that the majority do not have any return-to-work support and face logistical and maternal wellbeing challenges. Moreover, teacher-mothers are statistically much more likely to be dissatisfied and to consider leaving the teaching profession during their return to work than they were before announcing their pregnancy. This presentation offers a valuable insight into the positive impact on retention that a supportive and inclusive culture can have for mothers.



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Session 2

Addressing the class bias in research on the menopause – exploring the lived experiences of menopausal women in the workplace

Samantha Evans, University of Kent

The reported impact of menopausal symptoms on women's working lives makes the study of the employee experience of the menopause important. Research shows that menopausal symptoms can cause significant disruption to the performance and career trajectory of women with implications for their wellbeing, gender pay and pension gaps, and the financial costs to employers and the wider economy (Bazeley et al, 2022). In addition, work has been found to be at the core of how women experience menopause (Atkinson et al, 2018; Brewis et al, 2017), having both the capacity to 'generate, exacerbate [and], even relieve' menopause symptoms (Jack et al., 2019: 129). While research on the menopause and the workplace is emerging, it has tended to focus on women in white collar, professional and/or managerial jobs (Brewis et al., 2017; Grandey et al., 2020; Jack et al., 2019). However, only 35% of women in employment work in these roles (Buchanan et al, 2023). This means that women working in lower skilled, lower paid work, typically classified, and self-identifying, as working-class employees, have been largely neglected resulting in a class gap in our knowledge. This project seeks to answer the question of whether there are any social class dimensions that impact employees' experiences of the menopause at work. Funded through a British Academy/Leverhulme Small Grant, the project uses focus groups recruited from a single organisation employing staff across the range of Approximated Social Grades (ASGs).

A balancing act? A critical exploration of work-family dynamics

Clarice Santos, Middlesex University

The interplay between work and personal life poses significant challenges, particularly for women, whose experiences are often shaped by intersecting social, cultural, and economic factors. Traditional perspectives on this interface often stem from Global North contexts, potentially overlooking the nuanced dynamics of power and privilege, as well as the impact of intersectional identities (Jaga, 2020). Drawing upon a critical lens informed by transdisciplinarity and intersectionality, this project delves into the complexities of the work-family interface with a focus on Brazilian migrant women in the United Kingdom. Through a review of existing literature, followed by a netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2020), our study questions core concepts such as "balance" in the context of work and family dynamics and explores the potential of inclusive practices and policy interventions to address the challenges faced by this group. This is part of a larger project that applies transdisciplinary approaches to work-family research to facilitate collaboration across diverse fields of knowledge and a more holistic understanding of interconnected issues in communities, work and families (Bernstein, 2017). By amplifying women's voices and experiences, we hope to contribute to reducing inequalities within workplaces and beyond.



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Session 3

Racism and sexism are permitted by default: a study of UK Higher Education,

Karen Jones, University of Reading

The underrepresentation of women and ethnic minorities in senior leadership and professorial roles is a significant issue across UK Higher Education. Women are 47.9% of the academic workforce, but only 30% of professors and 33% Heads of Institutions. Figures dip respectively to 9.2% for the female Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) academic workforce and 3.3% for BAME female professors (Advance HE, 2023), but plummet to 61 when considering the number of Black women professors in the UK (WHEN, 2023). Over recent decades extant literature has documented the challenges women academics face gaining recognition in the academic workplace and advancing their careers, especially to senior positions within the academy. Studies into ethnic minorities' experiences in academia have grown, along with intersectional studies of gender, ethnicity and race. Adopting a critical race and feminist standpoint perspective, this presentation will report findings from a mixed methods online survey of 186 UK academics which comprised of 96 (51%) white females, 19 (11%) minority ethnic females, 49 (29%) white males, and 7 (4%) minority ethnic males. Comparisons will be drawn between the experiences and perceptions of female and male academics from minority and majority backgrounds regarding support mechanisms, opportunities and barriers to career progression, as well as their perceptions of discrimination and how this is handled in university space. Utilizing intersectionality as an aspect of critical race theory (Crenshaw et al., 1995), attention will be given to axes of differentiation across different groups.

Leadership identity construction of middle managers of Russian and Arabic ethnic origin in the context of the Institute Wide Language Programmes

Tanya Linaker, Kings College London

This paper investigates problematic leadership experience and gendered identity construction of middle managers of Russian and Arabic ethnic origin in the context of the Institute Wide Language Programmes (IWLP) of UK Universities. Although there have been studies investigating UK Universities IWLPs' teaching and learning processes, programme design limitations, students' dropout rates, and staff training needs, there have been no specific studies of IWLP's leadership experience. Similarly, there was a substantial body of research on problematic female leadership experience in UK Higher Education, women's career obstruction, lack of diverse representation, hidden sexism and marginalisation and gender-differentiated employment criteria. However, there have been no investigation of educational leadership development of female leaders from ethnically diverse background at middle management level unable to progress to senior leadership positions. The aim of this study is to address the gap in the knowledge of ethnically and culturally diverse leadership identity construction by examining the women's narratives applying small story positioning analysis to understand female leadership experience in the context of the Institute Wide Language Programmes of UK Universities. The study makes a scholarship contribution to methodology through application of the method of positioning analysis of the dilemmatic nature of identity – becoming different and remaining the same, belonging to the community and being unique, becoming agentive, yet constructed by external discourse set in the context of small



stories as a site of identity construction. The study reveals the barriers to leadership development and the transformative aspect of cultural gendered leadership identity construction through narrative in interaction.

Introducing the LGBTQ+ travel tool. An interactive policy development tool.

Frances Hamilton, University of Reading

Co-authors: Tahlia Virdee

We are proud to introduce the LGBTQ+ Travel tool. This electronic toolkit allows employers and Universities to devise specific policy and practice considering LGBTQ+ student and staff engagement with international travel. The toolkit also allows individuals to check how their employer or University is supporting them where LGBTQ+ international travel is concerned. The tool is freely available and will be of interest to anyone who is concerned with LGBTQ+ international travel. The tool addresses the lack of policy in Higher Education and businesses regarding LGBTQ+ international travel. Following sending Freedom of Information request letters, our research found that only 27 universities (17%) have explicit policy in this area expressly considering LGBTQ+ welfare concerns when travelling worldwide (see our published research Hamilton and Giles, 2021). Policy development in this area is needed due to welfare concerns about LGBTQ+ persons travelling abroad. This is a diversity of legal, social and cultural treatment of LGBTQ+ persons worldwide. Sixty-six countries globally retain criminal sanctions concerning sex between men, others criminalise lesbianism, do not protect LGBTQ+ persons against discrimination, or recognise same-sex marriage, civil partnership or child custody rights and target transgender people through laws prohibiting 'cross-dressing' and 'disguise' offences. The impact on LGBTQ+ staff was further demonstrated when the authors interviewed fifteen LGBTQ+ academics in March 2022, about their lived- experiences of international travel. The cumulative findings of all of our research projects to date, highlight a distinct lack of effective policy including consideration of specified LGBTQ+ risks, dangers and concerns when travelling internationally.