



4th Accommodating Diversity in the Workplace Conference

Monday 8th June, University of Reading (Whiteknights Campus Edith Morley 227 and 228) and Online.

Conference Programme

9:10-9:40: Arrival

9:40-9:45: Welcome and Introduction

Session 1 (Online presentations)

9:45-10:20: Imagining working parenthood: young people's moral economies of when to return to work after having a baby, Patrizia Kokot-Blamey, Queen Mary University of London

10:20-10:55: Managing (In)Fertility in the Workplace: Line Manager Support for Women Undergoing Fertility Treatment, Caroline Biddle, Manchester Metropolitan University

10:55-11:10: Break

Session 2

11:10-11:45: From Entry-Level to Management: A Gendered Analysis of the Impact of First-Job Occupation and Occupational Mobility on Workplace Authority in the UK, Jagriti Tanwar, University of Westminster

11:45-12:20: Resourcing Women Through Menopause at Work: Coaching for Psychological Capital to Buffer the Demands of Mid Life, Catherine Wilton, University of Reading

12:20-12:25: Break

12:25-13:00: The Researched and the Resistant: Obstacles to Conducting Feminist Scholarship on Workplace Gender Inequality, Frances Hamilton, University of Reading and Dr Devran Gülel, University of Portsmouth

13:00-14:00: Lunch



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Session 3

14:00-14:35: Behind the masks – good work for autistic women, Claudia Plowden Roberts, Institute for Employment Studies and Stevie Barnes, UCL

14:35-15:10: “It feels easier being me”. Flexible Working Practices and the Inclusion of Neurodivergent Employees: Evidence Across Three Work Outcomes, Lisa Barclay, University of Reading

15:10-15:30: Break

Session 4 (Online presentations)

15:30-16:05: Women Doing Careers, Haffsa Rizwani, University of Reading

16:05-16:40: From Page to Practice: A Whole-School Literature Framework for Building Inclusion Literacy, Mabel Nwokoloh, University of Reading

16:40 - Close

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



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Abstracts

Session 1 (Online presentations)

Imagining working parenthood: young people's moral economies of when to return to work after having a baby

Patrizia Kokot-Blamey, Queen Mary University of London

This paper explores how young people imagine the reconciliation of paid work and care in anticipated transitions to parenthood, focusing on when and why they expect to return to work after having a baby. Drawing on survey data from UK university students, we show that family formation remains a strong normative aspiration, with most respondents expecting to marry and have children at around age 29, closely aligned with current demographic patterns. The analysis focuses on open-ended responses to a question about anticipated return-to-work timing, analysed thematically (Braun and Clarke, 2021). Women anticipated a return to paid work 11 months after birth with their accounts structured by four dominant moral logics: the primacy of early maternal presence and bonding; assessments of children's readiness for separation; financial considerations; and maternal mental health and employability. Decisions to return to work were frequently legitimised through narratives of children becoming less vulnerable, rather than framed simply as economic trade-offs. Men's narratives emphasised paid work as a key form of responsible fatherhood, drawing on provider norms and institutional constraints around leave entitlements, while also expressing support for maternal care following birth. Using an ethics of care perspective, and informed by matricentric feminist scholarship, these findings partially contrast with research on workers later in life, which documents the increasing centrality of paid work and productivity, also in structuring family life (Kokot-Blamey & Stringer, 2027).

Managing (In)Fertility in the Workplace: Line Manager Support for Women Undergoing Fertility Treatment

Caroline Biddle, Manchester Metropolitan University

One in six people experience infertility, yet research examining infertility in the workplace remains limited. Many individuals pursue assisted reproductive technology (ART), a stressful process that intersects with professional life. Despite growing awareness of the importance of supporting employees through major life events, challenges such as fertility treatment remain underrepresented in organisational policies and practices. Existing research has largely focused on the lived experiences of employees undergoing treatment, while the role of line managers implementing workplace support remains underexplored. This study investigates how line managers support women undergoing fertility treatment and identifies the barriers and enablers shaping that support. Using a qualitative case study approach, five organisations identified as fertility friendly were examined: a childcare setting, a law firm, a local authority, a university and a utility provider. These organisations either had a dedicated fertility policy or incorporated fertility-related provisions within broader leave policies. Thirty-two semi-structured interviews were conducted with line managers to explore their experiences when supporting female employees undergoing ART. The study is guided by Bos-Nehles et al.'s (2020) framework on intrinsic and extrinsic line manager attributions



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toward effective policy implementation. Interview data was analysed using reflective thematic analysis supported by NVivo. Findings indicate managers are committed to supporting staff. However, levels of knowledge and competence varied. Managers reported limited understanding of the demands of ART and expressed a need for training. Organisational support structures were inconsistent, and restricted managers' ability to provide flexibility. The findings suggest that organisations should strengthen managerial capacity through practical training and clearer guidance.

Session 2

From Entry-Level to Management: A Gendered Analysis of the Impact of First-Job Occupation and Occupational Mobility on Workplace Authority in the UK

Jagriti Tanwar, University of Westminster and Gurleen Popli, University of Sheffield

This article examines the impact of first-job occupation and occupational mobility on workplace authority in the UK, with particular emphasis on understanding gender-based differences. While 40% of women in the UK hold managerial positions, they persistently face barriers to reaching managerial roles, which have been attributed to disproportionate childcare responsibilities, a masculine and unsupportive workplace culture, and the motherhood penalty. However, there is a gap in understanding how the first job occupation influences the chances of attaining a managerial position. Using the UK Household Longitudinal Data from 2009 to 2019 (11 waves), consisting of 23,467 individuals, our preliminary findings suggest that women are significantly less likely to attain authority positions. Individuals starting their first job in occupations other than elementary and machine operator roles have a significantly higher chance of advancing to a managerial position. However, the chances are stronger in the top three occupations. Findings relating to occupational-sex segregation in the first job show that individuals beginning their careers in male-dominated occupations have significantly lower chances of gaining workplace authority. However, gender differences suggest that men entering male-dominated occupations are significantly less likely to hold managerial positions. In contrast, they are better off and have a significantly higher chance of doing so when entering female-dominated occupations. In contrast, women face disadvantages when entering both male- and female-dominated occupations. They are significantly less likely to hold a managerial position when beginning their careers in male- or female-dominated occupations. Our next step is to investigate whether occupational mobility helps explain the initial findings.

Resourcing Women Through Menopause at Work: Coaching for Psychological Capital to Buffer the Demands of Mid Life

Catherine Wilton and Rebecca Jones, University of Reading

One in three women report challenges at work during menopause as well as reduced wellbeing and quality of life, with support tending to be limited to medical interventions. In line with the Job Demands-Resources model, menopause can be conceptualised as a demand and psychological capital a resource which may help to buffer women's experience of menopause symptoms at work. As coaching has been found to increase psychological capital, wellbeing and performance in other contexts, this study sought to determine whether a psychologically-informed, holistic, non-directive coaching intervention would support women experiencing challenges at work due to menopause. We conducted a randomised, controlled



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trial with 75 peri-menopausal/menopausal women living in the UK in full-time employment. Participants were randomly allocated to receive either a brief (3 x 1 hour) coaching intervention, or to an active control group, receiving self-help materials. Results demonstrated that coaching had a significant positive effect on psychological capital, wellbeing and goal attainment when compared to the active control group. The study has important implications, as research has demonstrated that even small increases in employee psychological capital can lead to multiple benefits. We recommend that coaching is considered as a suitable option to support women working through the menopause transition.

The Researched and the Resistant: Obstacles to Conducting Feminist Scholarship on Workplace Gender Inequality

Frances Hamilton, University of Reading and Dr Devran Gülel, University of Portsmouth

Multiple methods to ameliorate gender gaps in the workplace have improved conditions, yet gender inequality persist. Ongoing research is needed to investigate this complex problem. This is underpinned by the Public Sector Equality Duty which requires engagement with disadvantaged groups to understand the impact of decision making. Private companies also emphasise participatory research by means of their corporate social responsibility agenda. We take the novel approach of researching the researchers. Our pilot-study finds that specific challenges are faced when conducting research into gender inequality in the workplace. These include criticisms of topic and methodology choice, issues connected with working in an area dominated by women which exacerbates lack of interest, challenges when attracting participants and negative experiences when presenting results. We conclude that when gender-related research is impeded, knowledge creation is limited, which in turn reduces the ability of relevant stakeholders to enact meaningful change.

Session 3

Behind the masks – good work for autistic women

Claudia Plowden Roberts, Institute for Employment Studies and Stevie Barnes, UCL

In the UK, good work is recognised as leading to positive health and economic outcomes. However, gaps remain in our understanding of the factors contributing to good, quality work for all and how this may influence labour market participation. This research looks specifically at good work for autistic women, a group facing both gender and ability-based disparities in the workplace. Through a knowledge exchange between researchers from University College London and the Institute for Employment Studies, a practice-focused resource was developed. Good Work for Autistic Women: A Toolkit for Employers, HR, Line Managers and Autistic People is rooted in extensive qualitative research conducted with autistic working women and informed by a lived experience advisory group. The toolkit aims to address the longstanding employment inequalities faced by autistic women and provides actionable guidance for organisations seeking to create truly inclusive workplaces. Alongside discussing the research findings, we will discuss the co-production process, highlighting the benefits this has had for furthering our understanding of the experience of autistic women in the workplace. The research was shaped by autistic women who ensured the findings authentically reflect their priorities and experiences. This participatory approach not only strengthens the practical



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relevance of the toolkit but also aligns with broader movements advocating “nothing about us without us.” The resource translates these co-produced insights into practical recommendations, offering concrete steps employers and HR professionals can take to improve workplace inclusion, from designing predictable work environments to providing clarity in expectations, enabling flexible working arrangements, and embedding neurodiversity positive management practices.

“It feels easier being me”. Flexible Working Practices and the Inclusion of Neurodivergent Employees: Evidence Across Three Work Outcomes

Lisa Barclay, Dr Rita Fontinha and Dr Melissa Carr, University of Reading

Research on inclusive workplaces has intensified as organisations seek to create equitable environments for diverse employee groups. At the same time, flexible working practices (FWP), widely recognised as central to diversity and inclusion strategies, have expanded significantly. Neurodivergent workers continue to experience persistent workplace inequalities, including underemployment, stigma, and exclusion, with evidence suggesting they derive particular benefit from FWP. Although prior research identifies positive associations between FWP and improved employment outcomes for this group, the mechanisms through which FWP fosters inclusion remain underexplored. This paper addresses this gap by examining how FWP shape retention, career progression, and individual performance among neurodivergent employees. Drawing on Shore et al.’s (2011) inclusion framework, this study conceptualises FWP as inclusive job design mechanisms that balance employees’ needs for uniqueness and belonging, thereby facilitating inclusion. Based on semi-structured interviews with 32 neurodivergent workers and managers, the findings indicate that FWP support sustained participation, career progression, and individual performance among neurodivergent employees. When these practices are universally accessible and normalised, they further enhance inclusion for this group. Theoretically, this study advances inclusion literature by positioning FWP as inclusive practices that enable the adaptation of work arrangements to meet individual needs while simultaneously reinforcing belonging within work groups. Practically, it provides lived-experience-based empirical evidence of how FWP shape key workplace outcomes for neurodivergent employees, offering actionable insights for organisations seeking to design genuinely inclusive work environments.

Session 4 (Online presentations)

Women Doing Careers

Haffsa Rizwani, University of Reading

This paper conceptualizes the past research in the emerging field leadership and gender and career with a focus on women’s careers, specifically the gender influences on women’s career paths, advancement, and success to the top of the organizational echelons. Departing from the tenacious gender imbalance in leadership positions, this paper teases out the intricacies of conflicts, tensions, dilemmas, and barriers/biases in the contemporary organizations that still hinders career advancement for many women. Reviewing the past scholarship through a gender lens, the literature is critiqued through a deeper analysis that centres women’s lived experiences, realities, and stories in doing their careers in contemporary times and unmask the gendered contradictions.



From Page to Practice: A Whole-School Literature Framework for Building Inclusion Literacy

Mabel Nwokoloh, University of Reading

Workplace diversity training— typically delivered through one-off workshops and compliance modules — consistently fails to produce lasting attitudinal or behavioural change. A systematic review of programmes from 2000–2022 recommends shifting towards long-term, continuous, multi-modal approaches embedded in organisational culture (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Lindsey et al., 2021). This paper argues that the English Literature classroom offers exactly such a model. Drawing on five years of practice at a bilingual secondary school in Accra, Ghana — where students represent over twenty nationalities — the paper presents a progressive, whole-school inclusion literacy framework delivered entirely through the Literature curriculum. Each year group engages with diversity through a distinct mode. Each component is grounded in pedagogical research. The narrative dimension draws on Keen's (2006) theory of narrative empathy — fiction as perspective-taking that enables readers to experience the mental states of unlike characters, with well-documented prosocial effects. The drama component builds on evidence that embodied, theatre-based learning produces deeper empathic engagement with social justice than instructional approaches alone. The oral and portfolio work reflects evidence that structured dialogue around difficult topics cultivates exactly the communication and perspective-taking skills inclusive workplaces require. The paper proposes a transferable three-stage framework — Encounter, Articulate, Create — that organisations can adapt for their own diversity and inclusion programmes. At each stage, parallels are drawn between classroom pedagogy and workplace practice: narrative empathy as a model for inclusion training; structured discussion as a template for facilitated dialogue; and creative production for real audiences as an alternative to passive awareness campaigns.